

THE
Barren Fig-Tree:

OR, A

Practical Exposition

OF THE

P A R A B L E

Luke 13. 6, 7, 8, 9.

Very useful for the awakening of those
that remain unprofitable under Gospel-
Privileges, and Vineyard-Enjoyments.

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By **Henry Pendlebury**, Minister of the
Gospel at Rochdale in Lancashire.

1710

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L O N D O N

Printed by **R. Juneway**, Jun. for **Ed. Giles**,
Bookseller in **Norwich**, near the Market-
Place, 1700.



THE
PREFACE
TO THE
READER.

Courteous Reader,

THOU art here visited by a poor Orphan, whose true Parent was overtaken with the Days of Darkness before it self comes to see the Light; but notwithstanding 'tis of truly Honourable and Pious Extract, and therefore, tho' a Stranger, yet is worthy of thine Entertainment. If thou hast had the Happiness of Acquaintance with the true Parent of this small Posthumous Treatise; if thou hast had a taste of his Gift and Spirit so every way Profitable, Exemplary, and Ornamental unto that high Station that He was placed in, and the

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Character that He did bear in the Church; if thou hast at any time sate under His Powerful Searching, and Fruitful Ministry, and thy Soul been fed and refreshed from His Lips; I perswade my self that no more needs to be added for the recommending of this small Treatise unto thine Acceptation and Perusal, than only to assure thee that it is the Genuine and Legitimate Off-spring of Him whose Name it bears. It is indeed a great Disadvantage that it must want an Education becoming its Extract; and that the more curious and exact Hand of its own Author, could not dress and fit it up for publick View; but this may rather beget in thee Commiseration than Disdain. It is a common Calamity, and publick Loss, that the Prophets cannot live for ever. But it is no small Comfort under that Calamity, that we may have the speaking Effigies [Poema est Pictura loquens] of silent Prophets, to preserve them in our Remembrance after their Disanimation, altho' the Sculpture be rough, and many of the Lines less exact, by reason of the Unskilfulness of the Hand that drew them. This is our Case in the Matter
before

to the Reader.

before us : The Reverend Author is removed from our View, and cloathed upon with Invisibilty, yet mayest thou see many of the lively Lines of his Spirit and Complexion in this small Sculpture, altho' not without some Slips, and rougher Strokes, that may have escaped the unskilful Pencil. But it is hoped that thou wilt readily excuse these, and thank fully accept the other.

I shall add a Word unto those into whose Hands this little Book may come, who have never known the Person, nor it may be heard of the Name of the Reverend Author. There are, amongst the different Tempers and Dispositions of Christians at this Day, many that are of itching Ears; curious and critical, that will account no Books worth their reading but such as are filled with high Flights and Strains of Mens Wisdom; will esteem no Lines strong and cogent, but such as can furnish them with Variety of new and quaint Notions; and are made up of measured Sentences, and decent Cadencies, of exquisite Contrivance, and artificial Composure. Reader, If this be thy Genius and Temper, and these thine Expectations in reading

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this Book, cease thy further Labour: For the Design of it is not to tickle the Ears, and gratifie the Fancies of the Curious, but to edifie the Souls of the Serious; to awaken the Consciences of careless and unprofitable Christians, and to quicken all unto a more suitable Fruitfulness and congruous Deportment under their respective Gospel Priviledges. The great End and Design of this Work is, that those that are advanced high in point of Spiritual Enjoyments, might be quickened and stirred up unto some answerable Improvement; that those that have a Room afforded them in [the Vineyard] the Church, that are planted in that fat and fruitful Soil, might not stand barren, and take up Room to no purpose, as Ground-Cumberers. But if thou desirest to have thy Conscience awakened, and thy Soul profited, rather than thy Fancy pleased, read on, and thou shalt have my Prayer to the God of all Grace; that his Blessing may succeed thy reading; that the same good Effect may in some degree accompany the Press, that I believe ever did attend the preaching of the Reverend Author; who by a special Direction, Divine Blessing, and Art
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to the Reader.

not to be imitated by others, always found an easie Access into the Bosoms of his Auditory. Yea, I am fully perswaded (my self having been so often an Eye-witness) that he never preached a Sermon but what did plentifully warm the Hearts, and moisten the Faces of those that heard him. He was indeed richly furnished with all natural and acquired Endowments, qualifying him for that high and honourable Work, but especially he was eminent in Graces and Holiness, and in Humility singular. Knowledge, and Understanding, and Wisdom, and an excellent Spirit, was found in him. He was a Scribe well instructed; an Interpreter, one of a Thousand; a Workman, that needed not to be ashamed; unto whom a Place was due amongst the first Rank of Worthies. But tho' he was qualified for the most illuminated and polite Part of the Nation, yet he accommodated himself unto the darker Corner where he dwelt. And therefore sometimes thou mayest possibly meet with here and there a particular Word or Phrase, that is more peculiar unto that part of the Country, which he retained in Condescension to his vulgar

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Hearers: For he used Plainness, yet so as not to render it offensive unto the most Judicious.

Reader, If thou canst excuse and cover with a Mantle of Charity what is less to thy liking, as the Involuntary Failures of the second Hand, there is much more of the same Author not less desired. However, that the Blessing of God may so accompany what is here written, as to render it both grateful and profitable unto thee; is the Hearty Desire and Prayer of

Thy true Friend,

and Soul's Well-wisher,

G. S.

THE

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Luke 13. 6, 7, 8, 9.

He spake also this Parable: A certain Man had a Fig-Tree planted in his Vineyard, and he came and sought Fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his Vineyard, Behold, these three Years I come seeking Fruit on this Fig-tree, and find none: cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground? And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this Year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear Fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

IN the Five first Verses of this Chapter, our Saviour, from the Example of the Galileans, and those Persons, whose Blood Pilate mingled with their Sacrifices, preaches the Necessity of Repentance to the Jews: Telling them, that except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. And in the Four next Verses he further

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ther illustrates it by this *Parable*, wherein, by an apt *Similitude*, he sets before their Eyes the sad and fatal End that is coming on *Impenitent* and *Unprofitable Persons*.

The main Scope of the *Parable* is, to set out Four Things. 1. The Lord's Kindness towards this People. 2. The Unkindness and Barrenness of them. 3. The Lord's Long suffering oft-times towards them. 3. The Judgments that was coming, and would inevitably fall on them, if not prevented by better Fruit.

This is the Scope of the *Parable*. And as our Saviour in this sets forth the State and Condition of that People before them, so in the *Parable* (as in a Glass) we may foresee and read the Fate of *Nations*, *Churches*, *Families* and *Persons*, who continue *Barren* and *Unprofitable* under the Gospel.

In it we may take notice of these Six Things.

First, *What it is that our Saviour resembles them unto*, (viz.) a Fig tree, v. 6. A Fig-tree is a Useful, a Fruit bearing Tree. The Naturalists observe of it, that it's seldom barren, but is bearing Blossoms, young green Fruit, and ripe Fruit, all the Year succeeding one another. In those hot and Eastern Countries they are so useful, both in regard of the, 1. Commodity of Shadow, having a very broad Leaf, yeilding a cool and pleasant Shade. 2. And Plenty of

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of Fruit, that People lived under them, had a great part of their Livelihood out of them. And hence the Phrase of, *Every Man dwelling safely under his Vine, and under his Fig-Tree.*—And eat ye every one of his Vine, and every one of his Fig-Tree.—*1 Kings 4. 25. Ifay 36. 16. They shall sit every Man under his Vine, and under his Fig-Tree, and none shall make them afraid. Mic. 4. 4.*

Observe 1. That Persons living in the Church are resembled to Fruit-bearing Trees.

Here you see, to the Fig-Tree; and so in other Places, to the Vine, the Olive, the Palm-Trees. This may shew us, 1. What we should be, viz. Fruit-bearing Persons. 2. What God expects of us, viz. That we bear Fruit. 3. What those are who are what they should be. They are Fruitful; Fruit-bearing Persons. The Sap of their Religion runs not all out into the Leaves of a specious Profession, but up into sweet, and solid Fruits of Holiness and Righteousness.—*To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them Beauty for Ashes, the Oil of Joy for mourning, the Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness: That they might be called Trees of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.*—*Psal. 1. 3. He shall be like a Tree planted by the River of Water, that bringeth forth Fruit in his Season, his Leaf shall not wither.*—*Jer. 17. 8.*
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He shall be like a Tree planted by the Waters, and spreadeth out her Roots by the River, and shall not see when Heat cometh; but her Leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the Year of Drought, neither shall cease from yeilding Fruit. 4. To inquire who, and what we are? I'm a Tree: O! but what a kind of Tree? Am I a green, or a dry Tree? Am I a Fig-Tree, and a fruitful Fig-Tree? Or am not I a Bramble, a Briar, a Thorn, a barren Fig-Tree, that bears no Fruit?

Secondly, *Where this Tree was planted?* In the Vineyard, v.6. It was not a Tree of the Wood, or Wilderness, but of the Vineyard, seated and growing there: This was its Privilege above other Trees, that it had a Room and Place in the Vineyard, and among the Trees of the Vineyard.

Observe 1. *That it's a great Privilege to Persons to be planted, and have a Place within the Church, and among the People of God.* This was the Privilege of this People, that they were placed within the Vineyard, not in the Wood; among the Trees of the Vineyard, not among those of the Forrest. So I say, that it is a great Privilege to Persons to be planted, and have a Place in the Church, and among the People of God.

My Beloved, Trees that are planted in a Vineyard enjoy many Benefits that Trees which grow wild in Woods and Forrests partake

partake not once of. As, 1. They are under the Eye and Care of the Keeper, and Dresser of the Vineyard. 2. They are seated in a fat and good Soyl. 3. Secured with a strong Fence. 4. Plied with a good Culture. The Dresser takes great Pains, in pruning, digging, and dunging about them, that they may bear Fruit. And as Trees in Vineyards, so Persons in the Church have many Priviledges and Benefits that others are deprived of. As, 1. The Benefit of enjoying the Gospel, and Gospel-Ordinances. 2. The Labours and Pains of Faithful Ministers. 3. The Prayers, Counsel, and Examples of the Servants of God. 4. Happy Occasions and Opportunities of partaking of the good Things of God. 5. Many outward and common Mercies. *Cham* was saved in the Ark for *Noah's* sake. They are preserved in the Field (the Church) for the Wheat's sake. See then,

First, Our Priviledge in this, that we are placed at this Day in the Vineyard; when many poor Families, yea, great Towns, nay, mighty Nations and Kingdoms of People, lye without the Pale, and in a Wilderness. O Sirs, this is a Mercy, that has many Mercies folded up in it! A Mercy that is fallen to our Lot; not by Casualty and Accidence, but by the Gracious disposing Hand of God, who *hath made* ^{Acts 17.} *of one Blood all Nations of Men, for to* ^{26.} *dwell on all the Face of the Earth, and* *bath*

hath determined the Times before appointed, and the Bounds of their Habitation.

Secondly, What Cause we have to bless God for his Goodness in this Behalf, that when his Vineyard takes but a little Nook and Corner of the World, He has given us a Room therein, when Thousands and Ten Thousands are thrust into the wide and wild Wilderness of Paganism, Turkism, and Popery.

Thirdly, What Engagement we have on us to improve our Priviledges; and be as Trees of the Vineyard, not of the Forrest. O live up to your Priviledges, *and let your*
 Phil. 1. 27. *Conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ*,—standing fast in one Spirit, with one Mind, striving together for the Faith of the Gospel. You are planted in the Vineyard, and God of Heaven expects more of you than others, as you may further see in the third Particular.

Thirdly, *What the Lord expected from this Fig-Tree, thus planted in the Vineyard, viz. Fruit, v. 6.* He came, and sought Fruit thereon. He *looked*, not to find this Tree that was thus advantageously planted, like a Tree in the Wood, *i. e.* bare and empty, but laden with Fruit. He came and sought Fruit thereon.

1. Observe, That the Lord comes into his Vineyard, to observe the State of the Trees that grow therein. He's here resembled to a Man, coming into his Vineyard,

to see the Trees that grow there, whether they be fruitful or barren. So (Sirs) the Lord is in his Church, and takes notice of every Person therein. 1. What Use, what Improvement they make of their Priviledges, and his Betrustments. 2. How they carry it towards him. 3. What they do from Year to Year. 4. Who are fruitful, and who are barren. There's not a Tree in all the Vineyard, but he has an Eye upon it, and knows it more exactly than you do any Tree in all your Orchard.

O think on the Eye of God that follows you to and from Ordinances: When you go to Means, think God is now saying, *Venio*: And when you are under them, think he's saying, *Veni*, I'm come to seek Fruit, and all the Week long think of this, that he's coming to seek Fruit. And, O remember, Sirs, that you cannot be in any corner of the Vineyard, but if you be barren, he'll soon find you out.

Observe 2. That where the Lord affords great Enjoyments, there he looks for answerable Improvements. He had brought the Fig-Tree into the Vineyard, and now comes to look for Fruit thereon. He brought it not thither to stand useles, or only to take up room, and make one among the rest of the Trees, but to yeild him Fruit. So, Sirs, this is God Expectation when he first takes and puts us under fair Advantages: He comes in the next place with the

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the Basket for Fruit: And where this fails, he comes next (as we may see) with the Ax to cut it up. Great Betrustments must have answerable Improvements. For (this see Luke 12. 48.)—Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they shall ask the more. We have it also set down in the Parable of the Talents, Luke 19. 12. He saith, A certain noble Man went into a far Country to receive for himself a Kingdom, and to return. And he called his Ten Servants, and delivered them Ten Pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.—And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received his Kingdom, then he commanded these Servants to be called unto him to whom he had given the Money, that he might know how much every Man had gained by trading.—Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy Pound hath gained Ten Pounds. And he said unto him, Well done, thou good Servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou Authority over Ten Cities.—And the second came, saying, Lord, thy Pound hath gained Five Pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over Five Cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy Pound which I have kept laid up in a Napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an Austere Man: thou takest up that thou laid'st not down,

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down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own Mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked Servant: Thou knewest that I was an austere Man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow. Wherefore then gavest not thou my Money into the Bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with Usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the Pound, and give it to him that hath Ten Pounds.—For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath, shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. Rev. 2. 21. I gave her space to repent of her Fornication, and she repented not.

1. Our Enjoyments bring Engagements along with them to our Hand; Sirs, let's think of this: We have great Betrustments, and they are laying us under great Engagements.

2. What the Lord is looking for from us: We have great Enjoyments, and God has great Expectations. He looks for answerable Improvements at our Hands. O Sirs! the Lord looks for more of us than others; more of us than Pagans, than Turks, than those that live in dark and obscure Corners, where there is little Light of the Gospel; more of us than of our Forefathers, who wanted many of those Means and Helps that we have. Whatever our

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Improvements are, God's Expectations are great from us.

3. What need we have to improve what God puts into our Hand: He looks for great Improvements, and you see he'll come to see how we improve; and how will we answer it, if he find not this, or bear the cutting down that will come after?

3. *Observe*, That it's not a bare possession of Church-priviledges, and a fair profession of Religion that will serve us. It was not Leaves that he came to seek for, but Fruit, on the Fig-tree: If Leaves would have served, why here were fair Green spreading Leaves, that made a goodly shew, and gave a great shadow; Ay, but this was not it, it was Fruit, Fruit that he sought. So, my Beloved, they are not the Leaves of a Profession, how broad and fair soever, that will serve our Turns; or that we can put God off with; but Fruits: As Sobriety, Righteousness, Godliness, Justice, Equity, Truth, Faithfulness, Mercy, &c.

Mic. 6. 8. *He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? — Teaching us, that denying Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World.*

Tit. 2. 12. *Teaching us, that denying Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World.*

1. Take heed of resting in a Profession of Religion, without an answerable Conversation. This, Sirs, hath been the Practice of many in this Age. They have put

put on very specious Professions, and been high in them above others, but low, as low in their Conversation as others. But, O beware of this, this will not do: Are you pleased, Sirs, when your Fruit Trees bring you a fair sight of Leaves from Year to Year, but no Fruit? Does this content you? Why, and do you think that God will be pleased if you bring forth no Fruit, but only Leaves? He'll not, he'll not: His great Inquiry is for Fruit. Here is a fair, a lovely Tree; O! but where's the Fruit? I find nothing but Leaves on it. O! beware, if God find you thus, lest he do by you, as he did by the Fig tree, *Mat. 21. 19.* He cursed it, 1. *In Testimonium*, to shew his Deity. 2. *In Typum*, to shew the end of an empty Profession.

2. Take heed of matching a Profession and sinful Practice together. This was the Case of the *Jews* of old, (*Jer. 7. 9, 10.* *Will ye steal, murder, and commit Adultery, and swear falsely, and burn Incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods, whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this House, which is called by my Name, and say, We are delivered to do all these Abominations?*) And too many in all times have made fair Professions to serve only as Covers for foul Actions. For, my beloved, if Leaves without Fruit will not do, then Leaves with bad Fruits will do ill. O look to it! It will be sad,

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when God comes to a goodly Tree, seeking Fruit thereon, if, instead of finding Fruit, when he begins to turn up the Leaves, he find Excess and Drunkenness under one, Oppression and Violence under another, Deceit and Guile under another, and Backbiting and Slanders under the rest. For if Leaves will not do, then Leaves and such Clusters of wild Figs will not do.

4. You have seen what the Lord expected from this Fig-tree, *viz.* Fruit.

We pass now to the Fourth, *viz.* *What God met with in this Fig-tree, that was thus planted? And that was a Disappointment, v. 6. He came, and sought Fruit thereon, and found none.* It was an empty Tree, a barren Tree. He might carry away his Basket, as empty from it, as he brought it to it; for here was no Fruit to be had.

- I. 1. *Observe,* That a People, who have great Betrustments, and are honoured with rich Priviledges, oftentimes proves barren and unprofitable under them. It was thus here. This Tree (shadowing this People) might as well (for any Fruit that was upon it) have grown in the Wood, as in the Vineyard. They had many Priviledges, much laid out on 'em, but were no better than those who had nothing. *Israel was an empty Vine.—What could I have done more to my Vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should*

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should bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes? And our blessed Saviour denounces a Wo. *Wo unto thee Chorazin,* Matth. 11. *wo unto thee Bethsaida: for if the mighty* ^{21.} *Works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in Sackcloth and Ashes.—* For Heb. 6.7,8. *the Earth which drinketh in the Rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth Herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth Blessing from God. But that which beareth Thorns and Briars, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.* Thus you see, that the People of the Jews, who were honoured with great and rich Priviledges, above all others, yet they notwithstanding proved barren and unfruitful. And is not this Truth fulfilled this Day in our Eyes? Have we not many of these Trees, many Vineyard-Trees, that have no Fruit on them; that have grown many Years in the Vineyard, but might as well have been all the while in the Wood, for any Fruit they have born? They have been rained on Year after Year, digged about and pruned; and God may say of them, what could have been done more to them, that I have not done, and yet I find no Fruit. Alas! are not many as grossly ignorant, as if they had never sate under the Gospel; as Earthly, as if they had never heard of Heaven; as empty of Truth, Honesty and Equity in their Dealings, as if they

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they had been been trained up among the worst of Heathens? May not one find as much Humanity, Morality, Civility, Equity, Sobriety, Chastity, &c. even among the Pagans, as is to be found in many Christians in this Age? Alas! alas! the Vineyard is thronged and crowded, from Side to Side, with empty, fruitless, dry Trees; there's *tantum non*, not one, but many of these. And the Vineyard is turn'd into a Forrest.

Let us, (Sirs) consider with our selves. We have had great Enjoyments, and high Priviledges, but how have we improved them? What have we proved under them? Are we not barren? I fear, if God should set a Mark upon every fruitless Tree in his Vineyard, there's but few of us were like to go away without our Mark.

2. *Observe*, That such barren People frustrate to themselves the Lord's Layings out on on them, and disappoint his Expectations from them. Thus here, they had no Good by Vineyard Priviledges; he had no Vineyard Fruit from them. They might as well have been quite out of the Vineyard, in regard of any Saving Good to their Souls, by being in it: And he might as well have set them in a dry Ground, in regard of any Service they did him. And thus it's still concerning barren People: The Lord may complain of them, as David did of Nabal's Flocks; *Surely in vain have I kept all that this Fellow hath in the*
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Wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertain'd unto him, and he hath requited me Evil for Good. So in vain have I, 1. Planted them in my Vineyard; 2. Sent my Vine-dresser to them; 3. In vain have I watered and digged about them; 4. Betrusted them with so many Sabbaths, Sermons, Ordinances and Advantages: All's lost, I have no Glory, they have no Good. I come seeking Fruit, and find none.

1. How sad it is to be a barren Tree in God's Vineyard: An unprofitable Person in God's Church is like a barren Tree in the Vineyard. This, Sirs, is a sad, a very sad Case such Souls frustrate to themselves the Means of Eternal Blessedness, and disappoint the Lord of all that Glory that is due to him. This is a sad Case indeed, and yet it is the Case that many Professors are in, who little think of it. This is the Case of many a Soul in our Assemblies.

2. What Cause they have to be thankful, who are made fruitful. It's a Mercy to be in the Vineyard, but it's a double Mercy to be fruitful there. *The Righteous shall flourish like the Palm-tree: he shall grow like a Cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the House of the Lord, shall flourish in the Courts of our God. They shall bring forth Fruit in old Age: they shall be fat and flourishing.* O Soul, if thou canst not say that God makes thy Body prosper, nor thy Family to groan, nor thy

*Psal. 92.
12, 13, 14.*

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thy Estate to flourish, yet if thou canst say as Holy David did;—*But I am like a green Olive-tree in the House of God.* Thou hast Cause to rejoice more on this Behalf, than in all outward Things, how great and advantageous so ever.

V.

Fifthly, *But we pass on to the Fifth Thing in this Parable, viz. What the Lord did upon this Disappointment to this fruitless Fig-tree.* Or the Sentence that he passed on it; and this we have, v. 7. *Then said he unto the Dresser of his Vineyard, Behold, these Three Years I come seeking Fruit on this Fig-tree, and find none: cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?* This is the Doom that's passed on it; where we may take notice of Four Things.

1. How long he waited e're he passed the Sentence on it.

2. What the Sentence is, that (after this time) was passed, and it was dreadful. [*Cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground.*]

3. To whom he gave it in charge, to see the Sentence executed on it; viz. The Dresser of his Vineyard.

4. The Reason why he will bear no longer, but will have it now cut down, and cast out of the Vineyard. [*It cumbereth the Ground.*] These Four Particulars we will a little consider and explain.

First, *We begin with the First, viz. The time that the Lord had tarried and waited for Fruit on this Fig-tree, before he proceeded*

ceeded to give Sentence against it. [*Three Years*, v. 7.] All this time he had sought for Fruit, and was disappointed Year after Year. By these Three Years some understand,

1. The threefold Dispensation of God, wherein he came in a special manner to the Jewish Nation, 1. By the Promulgation of the Law of *Moses*, wherein he prescribed those Fruits that would be pleasing to him, in *Ecclesia*, *Politia*, *Oeconomia*. Of this it's said, *Psal.* 147. 19, 20. *He sheweth his Word unto Jacob, his Statutes and Judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any Nation; and as for his Judgments, they have not known them.*

2. By the Ministry of the Prophets, when the Priests were negligent in keeping the Law, and had corrupted all his Commandments. He raised up extraordinary Prophets one after another, and sent them to call both Priests and People to their Duty, *2 Chron.* 36. 14, 15. *Moreover, all the chief of the Priests, and the People transgressed very much, after all the Abominations of the Heathen, and polluted the House of the Lord, which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their Fathers sent to them by his Messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had Compassion on his People, and on his dwelling Place. But they mocked the Messengers of God, and despised*

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spised his Words, and misused his Prophets. So Hosea 6. 4. O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your Goodness is as the Morning Cloud, and as the Early Dew it goeth away. Therefore have I bewed them by the Prophets: I have slain them by the Words of my Mouth, and thy Judgments are as the Light that goeth forth.

3. By the Mission of his Son. When he had sent his Servants the Prophets into the Vineyard, and the Husbandmen had beaten one, and killed another, and stoned another.——*Then last of all he sent unto them his Son, saying, they will reverence my Son. Of this it's said, Heb. 1. 1, 2. God who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake in time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets; hath in these last Days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed Heir of all things.*

Matth. 21.
36, 37.

And thus by these Three Years some understand this threefold Dispensation of God, the Promulgation of the Law of *Moses*; the Ministry of the Prophets, and the Mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. And if this was not intended by our Saviour in this place, yet this is a certain Truth, that God had come all these ways unto this People, seeking Fruit, and found none: And yet (tho' there were here and there some goodly Branches laden with many sweet Figs) they were all along generally a barren,

ren, and empty Fig-tree, bare of Good, nay, abounding with Bad Figs. *Moses*, which gave the Law to 'em, draws up this heavy Charge against them; *Deut.* 9. 24. *You have been rebellious against the Lord, since the Day that I knew you; and Chap.* 31. 27, 28, 29. *I know thy Rebellion, and thy stiff Neck: Behold, while I am yet alive with you this Day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord, and how much more after my Death. Gather unto me all the Elders of your Tribes, and your Officers, that I may speak these Words in their Ears, and call Heaven and Earth to record against them. For I know that after my Death ye will utterly corrupt your selves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you: and Evil will befall you in the latter Days, because ye will do Evil in the Sight of the Lord to provoke him to Anger, through the Work of your Hands.* And as *2 Chron.* for the time of the Prophets, Matters were *36. 16.* not mended among them; as in the foregoing Text 'tis said, *They mocked the Messengers of God, and despised his Words, and misused his Prophets. And when last of all he sent his own Son, he was not received—He came unto his own, and his own* *John 1. 11.* *received him not.* Nay, as in that Parable before mention'd, it's said, *They caught him, Matth.* 21. *and cast him out of the Vineyard, and slew* 39. *him.* This is the first way that we may understand this Phrase of [Three Years.]

2. This

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2. This term of [Three Years] may point at, and denote the time of our Saviour's publick Ministry among the *Jews*, as having now finished his third Year; and being entering on his fourth, which was his last amongst them. He had come now Three Years, and called the whole Nation to Repentance by his preaching, and Miracles every where among 'em. He had preached from City to City, from Village to Village: And he had done many mighty Works throughout their Coasts, and yet after all he might (as to many of them) take up that sad Complaint, (as was foretold, *Isa.* 49. 4.) *I have laboured in vain, I have spent my Strength for nought, and in vain, i. e.* after Three Years labour among 'em; they were still a *barren Fig-tree*. All his Pains and Preaching brought them no Good; nothing will do some People any Good; no Means, no Mercies will leave them any better.

3. This term of [Three Years] (if we take it in Reference to particular Persons) may Point at the Three Ages of Men, wherein God comes to them. 1. He begins with us in our Childhood, and looks for a beginning of Fruit in those tender Years. As the Husbandman.

Secondly, If we find none then, he comes next in our Youth, *la Inventate*. Follows us, or waits on us from our Childhood to the

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the Days of our Youth, and then calls upon us to *Remember our Creator in the Days of our Youth, while the evil Days come not, nor the Years draw nigh, when we shall say, we have no Pleasure in them.* 3. If this Year, this Time miss too, he comes again the third Year, and seeks Fruit on us, *in virili etate.* And, 4. If yet there be no Fruit, he bears with some (upon the Intercession of the Vine-dresser, the Ministers of the Gospel) another Year, and comes *in ultima senectute.* This is the third way of understanding the term of [Three Years.]

4. This term of [Three Years] plainly holds out a certain and considerable space of time; that the Lord bears with, and waits on an unprofitable People, or Person, before he proceed to sentence them to down cutting. This for Explication.

1. *Observe,* That the Lord keeps a strict and exact Account of the Time and Means that he affords unto a Place and People. These Three Years he came seeking Fruit on this Fig-tree, and found none. He had not forgotten what time they had been entrusted with such Means, Opportunities and Priviledges. So (Sirs) he takes an exact Account thereof; it's very observable, that the Year, and Month, and the very Day of the Month, when the Word of the Lord came to several of the Prophets, stands on Record in the Scripture. *Jer.*

1. 1, 2, 3. *The Words of Jeremiah the Son of*

of Hilkiash, of the Priests that were in Anathoth, in the Land of Benjamin: To whom the Word of the Lord came in the Days of Josiah, Son of Amon King of Judah, in the thirteenth Year of his Reign. It came also in the Days of Jehoiakim, the Son of Josiah, King of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh Year of Zedekiah the Son of Josiah King of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive, in the fifth Month. Here is the time when, and then it is mentioned how long; namely, *From the thirteenth Year of Josiah the Son of Amon King of Judah, even unto this Day (that is the 23d Year) the Word of the Lord came unto me, and I have spoken unto you.* Ezek. i. i. Now it came to pass in the thirtieth Year, in the fourth Month, in the fifth Day of the Month.—That the Heavens were opened, and I saw the Visions of God. Chap. 8. i. And it came to pass in the sixth Year, in the sixth Month, in the fifth Day of the Month, as I sate in mine House, and the Elders of Judah sate before me; that the Hand of the Lord God fell there upon me. Haggai i. i. In the second Year of Darius the King in the sixth Month, in the first Day of the Month, came the Word of the Lord by Haggai the Prophet unto Zerubbabel the Son of Shealtiel Governour of Judah, and to Joshua the Son of Josedech the high Priest. Zech. i. i. In the eighth Month, in the second Year of Darius, came the

Word

Word of the Lord unto Zachariah the Son of Barachiah the Son of Iddo the Prophet.
Thus the Lord counts to a Day. My beloved, 1. There is not one of his Servants that he sends to us, but he keeps an Account, how he is with us. 2. Not one Sabbath that he gives us, but he lays it up in Store. 3. Not one Sermon, but he has it on Record. 4. Not a Day, but he remembers it.

1. Therefore see what need we have to make a good use of our Time and Means. God is counting Days and Years with us, and, Sirs, as he takes an Account of his Layings out on us, so he will one Day require on Account of us, and reckon with us for every Day, and every Season. He knows how long, and he'll know of us what use we made of them. So that it concerns us to make good use of our Time and Means, which God affords us; to his Glory, and our own good Comfort and Advantage.

2. Let us carry this in our Thoughts continually, that God is keeping Counts with us. It may be a great Spur unto Care and Diligence, in improving our Time and Means to the best Advantage. Servants that know that their Masters have an Eye to the Time that they give them for their Business, will not be idle, and jangle about it, as those who have not their Master's Eye over them. So, Sirs, if we would fasten this upon our Heart, it would help

help to make us diligent and careful in this Business.

3. How sad it will be with those, who have much Time, and many Means, but remain unprofitable under all. O! Sirs, when the Lord, who is keeping Account with us, comes to reckon with you for the Three Years; for the Time and Means that he has given you, it will be a sad Day with you: The Mouths will be stopt of all those that have unprofitably and carelessly spent their Time.

2. *Observe*, That the Lord is very patient and long-suffering towards an impatient and unprofitable People. He takes them not at first, but bears long, and waits for better from them. These Three Years he came seeking Fruit on this Fig-tree, and found none. He did not cut down this unprofitable Fig-tree the first Year of its Unprofitableness, nor yet the second; no, nor the third Year. *Exod. 34. 6. The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, Merciful and Gracious, Long-suffering, and abundant in Goodness and Truth.* LONG-SUFFERING is one of the Divine Properties belonging to God. *2 Pet. 3. 9. The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, (as some Men count Slackness) but is Long-suffering to usward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance. He has great Riches of Goodness and Forbearance,*

bearance, and Long-suffering, Rom. 2. 4. And he is willing to shew his Wrath, and to make his Power known; endured with much Long-suffering the Vessels of Wrath fitted to Destruction, Rom. 9. 22. Of this we have many evident Examples in the Scripture. As, 1. In his Patience towards the old World. He was Long suffering towards the Men of those Times, after they were come to a Height of Impiety. 1. All their Imaginations were Evil continually. 2. All Flesh had corrupted his Way upon the Earth. 2. The Earth was full of Violence. 4. God Repented that he had made man upon the Earth, and it grieved him at his Heart. Gen. 6. 5, to 14.

Here was a People, one would think that was just ripe, and ready, and fit for Nothing but present *Down-cutting*; yet after this, and when it was thus, he had Patience with them an Hundred and Twenty Years. Says the Apostle, *When once the Long suffering of God waited in the Days* 1 Pet. 3. *of Noah, while the Ark was preparing—* 20. *And the Lord said, my Spirit shall not always strive with Man, for that he also is Flesh: Yet his Days shall be an Hundred and Twenty Years.* Gen. 6. 3.

2. In his Patience toward the *Canaanites*. He bore Four Hundred Years with them before he destroyed them, Gen. 15. 7, 13. *And he said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Caldees, to*
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give thee this Land, to inherit it. He promised to give this Land to Abraham yet before the fourth Generation they must not have it in Possession, but must be Strangers in it Four Hundred Years. And why? Why, v. 16. you have the Reason of it. Because the Iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full, q. d. my Patience shall be lengthened out towards them till they have made up their Measure.

3. In his Patience towards the Israelites in the Wilderness. *How oft did they provoke him in the Wilderness, and grieve him in the Desert? Psal. 78. 40. Very oft, many a Time, Forty Years long was he grieved with this Generation, Psal. 95. 10. yet all this Time was he Patient towards them. About the Time of Forty Years suffered he their Manners in the Wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven Nations in the Land of Canaan, he divided their Lands to them by Lot, Acts 13. 18, 19.*

4. In his Patience towards them in Canaan, afore he gave them up to be led Captive to Babilon. *Many Years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy Spirit, in thy Prophets: Yet would they not give Ear: Therefore gavest thou them into the Hand of the People of the Lands, Neh. 9. 30. Many Years. Jer. 32. 31. This hath been to me as a Provocation of mine Anger, and of my Fury, from the Day that they Built it, even unto this Day, that*

I should remove it from before my Face. i. e. Since they were planted in it, which was in the Time of David: And this was now in the Days of Zedekiah, immediately before its Destruction by Nebuchadnezer; which was about three Hundred and Forty Years. So long had God exercised Patience towards them.

The like Patience did our Saviour manifest towards *Jerusalem*, Mat. 23. 37. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them which were sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings, and ye would not? I might give you many the like Instances of God's Patience. See,*

1. That God hath no Pleasure in the Perishing of poor Sinners. He has told them no less in plain Expressions. *I have no Pleasure in the Death of him that Dies, saith the Lord God: Wherefore turn your selves and live ye. Say unto them, as I live saith the Lord God, I have no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked, but that the Wicked turn from his Way and live: Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil Ways, for why will ye Die, O House of Israel?—The Lord—is Long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should Perish, but that all should come to Repentance. And his Actions Proclaim it. Were this Work a Delight to him, he would not be so long a*

doing,

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doing, and so loth to do it; he would not put it off, not only from Day to Day, but also from Year to Year. O God's Long-suffering towards poor Sinners!

2dly, What Space and Time many poor unprofitable Sinners have allowed them to amend in. *As, Rev. 2. 21. I have given her Space to Repent of her Fornication.* So he gives time to amend in; and it's no little that he gives. He is no Niggard of Time for this Purpose. He *sometimes gives Nations whole Centuries, Congregations many Generations, and Persons many Years, one on the back of another, e'er he come upon them.* O the Time, the Time, that many have, had they but Hearts to improve it! Art thou Unprofitable? How much Time hast thou had already? How many Days and Years, that thou mightest never have seen?

3dly, How Inexcusable Dry Trees will be, when God Cuts them down out of his Vineyard, after so much Patience and Long-suffering exercised towards them. Oh, this Patience of God will leave no Room for any Excuse! Sirs, Think of it; if now you be Unprofitable. Time will come, when you shall know, that your Perdition is of your selves, and be forced to confess, that if any Patience would have won you, if any bearing and waiting from Year to Year might have done with you, Matters had not come to a Down-cutting. And, O think,

think, what a Worm this will be, when you are Cut down, and in another World: To remember, how once the Long-suffering of God, waited on you, while many a Day and Year, and precious Opportunity, went over you, that you made no Use of.

4thly, Why many Persons, like dry Trees, oft stand and take up Room, so long in the Vineyard? It's from God's Long-suffering and Patience; but of this in another Particular.

We find that this hath been, 1. Sometimes a Stumbling-block and Temptation to the Godly, when they have seen wicked Men Prosper and Fare well when they have done ill. *Wherefore* (says Job) *do the Wicked live, become Old, yea, are mighty in Power? Their Seed is Established in their Sight with them, and their Off-spring before their Eyes,* Job. 21. 7, 8. This humbled good *Asaph*. *As for me, my Feet were almost gone: My Steps had well nigh slipped.—For I was Envious at the Foolish, when I saw the Prosperity of the Wicked.* And says the Prophet *Jeremy*, —*Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: Jer. 12. 1, Yet let me talk with thee of thy Judgments: 2. Wherefore doth the Way of the Wicked Prosper? Wherefore are all they Happy that deal very Treacherously? Thou hast Planted them, yea, they have taken Root: They grow, yea, they bring forth Fruit: Thou art near in their Mouth, and far from*

their Reins. 2. Sometimes an Encouragement to Ill Men in their Ways of Sin, who have from thence thought that God was altogether like themselves, or at least an idle Spectator of the affairs of this World.

Pfal. 50. 21. *These things (says God) hast thou done, and I kept Silence.* What things were these? Why? *When thou sawest a Thief, then thou Consentedst with him, and hast been Partaker with Adulterers. Thou givest thy Mouth to Evil, and thy Tongue frameth Deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy Brother; and thou slanderest thine own Mothers Son.*—And what follows upon this? *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thy self.* i. e. That I was a Patronizer and an Approver of, at least a Conniver at thy Wickedness.

Thus you see this has been Matter, 1. Of Doubting to the Children of God, and Good Men. And, 2. Of Presumption to the Wicked and Impenitent Sinners.

But hence we may be informed, and have our Judgment set Right in this Matter. God keeps Silence at the Ways of wicked Men. Not because they are Innocent: Or because he hath any Pleasure in them, or their Ways, but out of Longanimity towards them. —*He Judgeth the Righteous, and is Angry with the Wicked every Day*; tho' he draw out his Patience towards them. Nor are they from Present Impunity to expect a Relaxation; or that God

God does not see and take notice of their Ways, so as that he will not bring them to Judgment, and punish them for their Wickedness; for altho' he be a God *keeping Mercy for Thousands, forgiving Iniquity, and Transgression, and Sin; yet he will by no Means clear the Guilty; visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children, and upon the Childrens Children, unto the Third, and to the Fourth Generation, Exod. 34. 7.* And altho' he keeps Silence for a Time, which gives them Occasion to think him altogether like themselves, yet he will reprove them at last, and set their Sins in Order before their Eyes.

5thly, See that you continue not sinning, while God is exercising Long-suffering, but let the Lord's Long-suffering lead you to Repentance. If he have born long with you, put him to wait no longer, but return to him. Consider,

1. What a Mercy it is that he hath born thus long with you, that his Patience has not been over e'er this. *Non expectabat Angeles.* They sinned, and they suffered as soon as they had sinned. They fell, and he waited not for their rising again. Why, he might have done thus with thee, and sent thee away as soon as thou camest a Sinner into this World, and never made one Offer of Mercy to thee: And he might many a Time since have Sentenced thee to Down-cutting, and have

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cast thee as a Barren and Unprofitable Tree out of his Vineyard, and yet he had been Righteous.

2. God will not always bear ; tho' he be Long-suffering, yet his Suffering will have an End, it will not be for ever : If Sinners will not put an End to their ill Lives, yet he'll put an End to his Winking at them : *The Lord could no longer bear, because of the Evil of your Doings ; and because of the Abominations which ye have committed,* Jer. 44. 22.

3. If you be not led by this to Repentance, the longer that he forbears, the heavier will his Wrath be, when it comes : It will come Double on all Unprofitable, Impenitent Sinners. Oh therefore, while the Long-suffering and patience of God continues, 1. Take your Time of Repentance. 2. Flee for Refuge to the Lord Jesus. 3. Sue out your Reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. 4. Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling.

Thirdly, Observe, That the Lord bears with, and waits on Barren and Unprofitable Persons, as long as there is hope of Fruit from them. [*Three Years.*] He does not here *forthwith* Cut down this Tree, because it brought not forth as soon as other Trees did ; but waited till the third Year was gone over it. Now,

1. The Fig-tree is an early Tree. 2. A Tree that useth to bear Fruit the first Year :
That

That it's Planted when his Branch is yet Tender. Or, 3. If it miss the first Year, yet it hits the second. Or, 4. If most flow, and it pass the second Year without Fruit, yet it's sure the third Year. 5. But and if it miss the third Year too, then it's usually Barren, and seldom does any Good, how long soever it grows afterwards. So that this Phrase of three Years signifies, that the Lord had tarried and waited for Fruit on this Fig-tree, as long as Fruit was to be expected on a Tree of that kind. So that I say, we may observe, that the Lord bears as long as there is Hope.

1. The Patience of God is Great towards Barren and Unprofitable Persons. He not only bears long, but bears till Persons come to be incorrigible and inamendable. He bare with *Judah* e'er he sent them to Babilon, *till they dealt proudly, and hardened not unto his Commandments, but sinned against his Judgments, and withdrew the Shoulder, and hardened their Neck, and would not hear*, Neh. 9. 29.

2dly, That God comes not to a Cutting down of the Unprofitable Trees, till they come to be Hopeless. Some are Cut down sooner; others tarry longer: But he knows how long every one is to be expected, when the Time of Fruit is past. And *tho' he suffer* some to stand in the Vineyard, after the time of Fruit is over with them, and to Wither away there upon the Ground;

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Ground ; yet he takes none out afore the Time of Fruit be over. All have their three Years there. *i. e.* The Time appointed for Fruit. Isa. 65. 8. *Thus saith the Lord, as the new Wine is found in the Cluster, and one saith, destroy it not, for a Blessing is in it : So will I do for my Servants sakes, that I may not destroy them all.* This is the third Observation. Again, if we look on these three Years as pointing at the several Ages of Persons, as hinted before, then he may yet further observe from them.

4thly, Observe, That the Lord expects early Fruit of Persons that art planted in his Church ; that they should begin to be Good betimes. Pray take Notice of it, you that are Young. God comes the first Year seeking Fruit on you. I say he does not drive till the first, and second, and third Year be done, but he comes the first Year, and looks for early Fruit. Remember now
 Eccl. 12. 1. *thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth : Now in the Morning of thy Age. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness,*
 Mat. 6. 33. *says our Blessed Saviour. Under the Law the First-born and First-fruits were to be Consecrated to the Lord. Sanctifie unto me all the First-born whatsoever openeth the Womb among the Children of Israel, both of Man and of Beast : It is mine—Thou shalt not delay to Offer the first of thy ripe Fruits, and of thy Liquors : The First-born*

Exod. 13.
 2, 22, 29,
 30.

born of thy Sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou dowith thine Oxen, and with thy Sheep: Seven Days it shall be with the Dam, on the Eight Day thou shalt give it me. i. e. To a Holy Use for me and my service. God would not tarry for the Last-born, nor for the Gatherings after the Harvest; but would have the first of Man, of Beasts, of Fruits. What was this for? But to shew, that we must give our First Years to the Lord. Does God come the First Year? Then,

1. This discovers the great Error and Folly of those, that think it soon enough to offer for Fruit the last Year. That they may stand Empty, and Useless in the Vineyard Year after Year, till it come to the Last, and then it will be time enough to think of Fruit. And this, Sirs, is a very common Thing. Alas, many think, they may live as they list in their Youth, and to old Age: Yea, and to a last Sickness; when the Tree is in Hewing down; and that then it will be soon enough to Repent. But you may see your Error in procrastinating and putting off Repentance to the Last. God comes in the First Year seeking for Fruit.

2dly, This lets young Ones see their Duty, their present Duty. Present I say, for this will not begin to be their Duty some Years since, or the next Year, but it's your Duty this Year, and this very Day to begin to Offer, and Frame for Fruit.

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Fruit. The Lord is coming into his Vineyard to seek for Fruit, and to see whether the Tender Grapes appear.

3dly, That we cannot begin to be Good too soon. People have a saying, that it's never too late to mend, but I am sure it's never too soon to begin to be Good. Begin as soon as e'er thou canst to bud, and put forth Fruits, Vineyard Fruits; and it will not be sooner, than the Lord of the Vineyard will be there, looking for Fruits.

4thly, Let this quicken young Ones to put forth betimes. God you see looks for it. And, Sirs, Early, Timely Fruits are very pleasing unto him. If a Man have a young and tender Tree in his Orchard, that begins to blossom and bear Fruit betimes, he is pleased with it, and admires it. Why, so timely Goodness is very Lovely. And (as one) early Grace finds great Grace in the Eyes of the Great God. Let this quicken young Ones to put forth betimes. If he come and find thee Empty the First Year, may be he'll pass by, and not Cut thee down. I, but if he come and find thee blossoming and bearing Fruit the First Year, then he'll take thee into his Eye, into his Care, yea, lay thee in his Bosom.

5thly, *Observe*, That the Lord looks for our best Time. That the best of our Time be spent in bringing Fruit to him. He looks for our First, Second, and Third Years. Our Child-

Childhood, Youth, and Riper Years. All the Flower and Cream of our Time. Under the Law, as the First, so the Best, was to be given to the Lord. *Out of all your Gifts ye shall offer every Heave-offering of the Lord, of all the best thereof, even the hallowed part thereof, out of it.* To shew that the best we have must be given unto him. Now this,

Numb. 48.
29.

I. Meets again with them, that think the Worst will serve God well enough: That they may give away their Childhood, Youth, and Riper Years to the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; and then come with their Old Age and Dry Bones, and offer them to God; as if any thing were good enough for him. But alas, Sirs, God deserves our Best, and he looks for our Best: And if we think to put him off on this Fashion, with our Worst, we may fear, that that Curse will fall upon us, *Mal. 1. 13, 14. Ye said also, behold what a Weariness is it, and ye have Snuffed at it, saith the Lord of Hosts: And ye brought that which was Torn, and the Lamé, and the Sick: Thus ye brought an Offering: Should I accept this of your Hand, saith the Lord? But Cursed be the Deceiver, which bath in his Flock a Male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing.* Consider, it Soul, hast thou now a Male in thy Flock? i. e. Thy best Time and Strength? And wilt not give it to him? Why, I tell thee thou may'st rather look to
be

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be Cursed with a Curse than find a welcome Entertainment, when thou comest with the Torn, and Lame, and the Sick *i. e.* with thy Old Age and Dry Bones to offer unto the Lord.

2dly, Then the Lord has little of that he looks for, of many People, in these Days. Alas, our First, our Second and Third, are empty, empty Years; and most part of our Vineyard-Trees bring no Fruit in all this time.

Once more we may from hence,

6thly, Observe, That it's the great Concernment of Persons, who have neglected their Morning Time, and stood Empty in the Lord's Vineyard unto Old Age, to bestir themselves, that the Lord may not now find them Empty. Consider it, Sirs, you that are grown into Years; has the Lord come to any of you the First, Second and Third Year? *i. e.* All the time of your Life past, seeking Fruit on you, and found none, and you entered, and going on the Fourth Year. Why, I say, consider it: It's (Sirs) your great Concernment to be fruitful. To begin now at last to Blossom and Bear Fruit. O think at it: Art thou an Old Vineyard-tree? Hast thou been a Dry Tree these Three Years? Why,

1. Thou hast frustrated the Lord's Expectations all this while. He has been looking for Fruit all along from the First Year that thou wast brought into the Vineyard.

2. This is but the *Begged Year*; the Year that is begged for, by the Intercession of the Vineyard-Dresser: The Sentence is past, and out against thee: The Sentence of DOWN-CUTTING; I, and down thou hadst been e'er now, had there been none to Beg for a Reprieve. Thou hast this Year upon TRUST, it's the *Begged Year* for thee.

3. This is the last Year; as it's but Begged, so it's the last Year. Thou must have no more Years, no further Time: When this is over, there will be no more *begging*, no *speaking* for thee, for another Year, or an Hour longer. Now if ever: Soul, now or never. For,

4. If thou bear not this Year, then *down*, *down* thou must. There will be no Body to interpose between Thee and the Ax; Thee, and the fatal Blow that will lay thee even with the Ground.

5. That this Year may be but a very short Year to thee. Oh think at it! If thou hast had Three long Years, and be yet offering to Trifle away thy Fourth Year; beware lest the Lord come and make a quick Work with thee, and a speedy Riddance of thee out of the Vineyard. This is the Sixth Observation.

6. Pray think on't, you that are full of Days. For, alas, the Vineyard is not only full of many young Sprouts, that have never born Fruit; but of many old Trees,
that

The Barren Fig-Tree.

that are stooping for Age, and leaning towards the Earth, whereon Fruit hath never grown to this Day : And whereon Fruit shall never grow henceforward for ever, if they make not haste; for they are near **DOWN-CUTTING** and casting out of the Vineyard.

II. *Secondly. We pass now to the second thing in this Fifth Part of this Parable, Viz.*

What the Sentence is, that (after this Three Years seeking for Fruit and finding none) was passed on this Barren Fig tree. And it was dreadful [Cut it down, why Cumbereth it the Ground:] This is the *Doom* that is passed on it. It must stand no longer. It must *down*. Do not only Lopp off some of its Boughs, or Tear off its Bark, or Hack, and Cut it in its Body, but *ἐκκοψον αὐτὴν* down, down with it Body, and Branches, and all. This is the *Sentence*. And from this we may observe these Nine or Ten Things.

First. Observe, That the Barrenness and Unprofitableness of Persons placed in the Church, and under precious Helps and Advantages, is very provoking to the Lord. We have observed before that,

1. It is a great Priviledge for Persons to be planted in God's Vineyard.

2. A People who have great Betrustments often prove Barren.

3. Such

3. Such Barren People frustrate to themselves the Lord's Layings-out on them.

Now here we may further observe, that this Barrenness was very provoking unto God. It was thus you see here. The Barrenness of this Tree (typifying the *Jews*) provoked the Lord; provoked him to Sentence it to **DOW-N-CUT-TING**, [Cut it down, why Cumbers it the Ground :] O Sirs, a Barren Tree in the Vineyard is not more provoking to you, than a Barren and Unprofitable Person is to the Lord. These are a Provocation to him from Day to Day.

1. What Matter of Provocation there is, and how much the Lord is provoked among us in this Generation. If Barrenness be Provoking, and Provoking even to *Down-Cutting*, then there is no want of Matter. Nay, we may wonder that our Nation stands, that our Congregations stand, that our Families stand, and that we our Selves are not Cut Down.

2. That our being in the Church, and partaking in Church Priviledges, will not Commend us unto God, if we be not useful and fruitful in it. There are many People that think all is well enough with them on this Account, *viz.* That they are in the Vineyard; that is to say, in the Church. Upon this they think all is Right, and God is pleased with them. But alas! Soul, thou mayest be mistaken in thy thoughts; I, and

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if thou be an Empty, and Dry Tree, God is not Pleased with thee; nay, he is sore Displeased with thee; and more Provoked by thee than with thousands of other Persons. One barren Tree in the Vineyard, is more Provoking, than twenty in the Wood: For on those Fruit is expected; in these he looks for none. O, if thou be a Barren Tree in the Vineyard, it were better for thee to stand in the Highway, or Hedge, or Forrest, or any where, rather than in the Vineyard: Thou couldest not be so great a Provocation to him no where, as thou art here.

2dly, *Observe, That no Outward Priviledges and Enjoyments whatsoever can secure unprofitable Persons and People from OFF-CUTTING.* [Cut it down, why cumberst it the Ground?] This Tree had great Priviledges; it stood in the Vineyard; it was Dressed; it bore a goodly sight of Leaves, Ay, but all could not save it from the Ax: Down it must because it was Barren. My Beloved, it's a Priviledge, a Priviledge that hath many Mercies folded up in it; That we have a Room in the Lord's Vineyard, a Place in his Church, an Enjoyment of the Gospel of Grace and Salvation, yet this, Sirs, will not secure and save us from DOWN-CUTTING. But if we be empty down we must, no less than if we were in the Highway, or Hedge; nay, and sooner too. Trees in the Vineyard oft go down shortly, when Hedge
Trees,

Trees, and Wood Trees, and Forrest Trees, stand and put up their Heads, many and many a Year, e'er they be Cut Down.

This is another thing Remarkable, no outward Priviledges and Enjoyments whatsoever, can secure unprofitable Persons and People from Off-Cutting. The *Israelites* in the Wilderness had great Priviledges: 1 Cor. 10. 1, 2, 3, 4. *Moreover, Brethren, I would not have you ignorant, how that all our Fathers were under the Cloud, and all passed thorow the Sea, and were all Baptized unto Moses in the Cloud, and in the Sea; and did all eat the same Spiritual Meat, and did all drink the same Spiritual Drink; (for they drank of that Spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ.) But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the Wilderness. The Jews that came to John's Baptism, were ready to glory in their Priviledges. Mat. 3. 9. Think not to say within your selves, we have Abraham to our Father—— They was ready to boast of their Priviledge of having Abraham to their Father, yet he tells them, v. 10. Now also the Ax is laid unto the Root of the Trees: Therefore every Tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is Hewen down; and Cast into the Fire. And our Saviour also tells them, (Mat. 8. 11, 12.) That many shall come from the East and West, and shall sit down with Abraham,*

D 2

Isaac,

The Barren Fig-Tree.

Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the Children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer Darknes: there shall be Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth.

■ Kings
2. 28, 29.

Therefore rest not in your Outward Priviledge, that you are in the Vineyard, and enjoy a place there: The Fatal DOWN-CUTTING Ax comes into the Vineyard, as well as into the Wood. As *Joab* was Taken and Slain in the Tabernacle, while he was taking hold on the Horns of the Altar, so we may be Cut down in the Vineyard, and Cast out into the Fire.

3dly, Observe, That the Lord's patience, towards an Impenitent and Unprofitable People, will have an end. He is long-suffering, as is abundantly seen: But tho' he bear long, and have great Patience, He will not bear always; but time will come, when he will bear no more. He had borne Three Years, and now says, *Cut it down.* His Patience had an end toward,

1. The old World.
2. Toward Sodom.
3. Toward Canaan.
4. Toward Israel.

He bore long with them, as we have already seen, yet at last he would bear no longer. *Amos* 8. 2. He said, *Amos, What seeest thou? And I said a basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my People of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more. So* (*Jer.* 44. 22.)

22.) the Lord bore with them till he could bear no longer, because of the Evil of their doings, and because of the Abominations which they had committed. — God will not bear always. Then,

1. Patience may be worn out and tired, by Sinners. Sirs, tho' the Lord be rich in Mercy, yet you or I may weary him with our Barrenness; weary him that he will stay no longer. The Jews did thus: — They made him to serve with their Sins, and wearied him with their Iniquities, *Isa. 43. 24.*

2. Impenitent and Unprofitable Persons, may not expect Final Impunity. Sirs, if we go on in sinning, the Lord may bear, and bear longer and longer; but Matters will come to a *Down-Cutting* at length. O think of it: This is that that many are ready to Harden themselves with, and Harden themselves from, *viz.* God's Forbearance. They have peace, and all's well from day to day; they go out, and come in, and live at quiet, and hence they think that things will never change. *These things hast thou done and I kept silence; — But I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. And, Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do evil.* But, my Beloved, beware of this. Tho' the Lord may bear from time to time, time will come when he will bear no longer.

Pfal. 106. longer. Many times did he deliver them,
 43. but they provoked him with their Counsel,
 and were brought low for their Iniquity. He
 Jer. 15. 6. bore with them till he was weary. Thou
 hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art
 gone backward, therefore will I stretch out
 my Hand against thee, and Destroy thee, I am
 weary with Repenting. *Temperando. i. e.*
a penis me Continendo. If People will not
 be weary of sinning, he will be weary of
 repenting.

3. Abuse not the Patience and Forbear-
 ance of God, by Continuance in Sin. Hath
 the God of Heaven borne with any of you
 now this 10, 20, 30, or 40 Years? Oh,
 put him to bear no longer. Let not your
Impenitency put an end to his *Patience*.
 It will not last always.

4. Let this quicken you to Repentance;
 if the Lord's Patience towards Impenitent
 Sinners will have an end, then *aut peniten-*
dum, aut pereundum; think of it, Sirs, if
 you be living in sinful States and Ways.
 There is no way but this for you, Repent
 quickly; and as there is no way for you to
 escape Down-Cutting but this; so you must
 not always expect to have the Lord tarry-
 ing for you, as he has tarried in the Days
 that are past.

4thly, Observe, That when the Lord's Pa-
 tience towards an Impenitent and Unpro-
 fitable People is at an end, then DOWN-
 CUTTING comes on them. [Cut it
 down, is the Sentence.] That will End,

(as in the last.) And when that is done, then this comes in. The ending of that, is the beginning of this. The day of the ending of God's Patience, will be the DOWN-CUTTING Day the to an unprofitable Nation, Congregation, or Person. When that is done, these are undone, and can stand no longer. *Isa. 42. 14. I have long holden my peace, I have been still, and refrained my self; now will I cry like a travelling Woman, I will destroy and devour at once.* Here is the Patience; I have long holden my Peace, I have been still; now will I cry— now will I destroy and devour at once. *g. d.* as tho' he should say, Now the time of my Patience is expired, and now will I destroy and devour them at once: So in that forenamed place, *Jer. 15. 6. Thou hast forsaken me, —therefore will I stretch out my Hand, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting.* So that I say, when the Lord's Patience towards an impenitent and unprofitable People is at an end, then DOWN-CUTTING comes upon them. Therefore see,

1. What it is that stands between an unprofitable People, and perishing, *viz.* The PATIENCE of God. This, this is all that stands between them. If thou beest a dry Tree in the Vineyard, there's nothing between thee and the Ax but God's long-suffering; this is that that keeps it off, *2 Pet. 3. 15. And account that the long-suffering of the Lord is Salvation.* — This is

The Barren Fig-Tree.

thy Salvation; and if this once shift out of its place, then nothing will be left between thee and Destruction. It's said of the *Canaanites*, Num. 14. 9. *That their Defence was departed from them.* That is (as some observe) the Lord's Patience and Forbearance, which had hitherto been their Protection, was worn out, and departed from them. He had said that he would suffer them Four Hundred Years. This time of his Patience was now expired, and so their Defence was departed from them. So, I say, is the Patience of God towards them; that is, the Shadow, the Defence of Nations and People; and when this is once expired, then their Defence is departed from them, and then nothing is between them and *Down-Cutting*. This is one thing to be consider'd; Oh it's the Patience of God that stands between unprofitable impenitent Sinners, and perishing.

2. How long is it that an impenitent People may look to scape? So long as the Lord is pleased to lengthen out his Patience towards them; and not a Day, or Hour longer; this is the longest: And how long (or short a time rather) this may be, no Body can tell; the very last Sand may this Day be running down in the Glass, that he has set for his Forbearance towards them.

3. When

3. When it is that the great Judgment comes upon an unprofitable Person or People, *viz.* When the long-suffering of God is come to a full Period. Then all Ways and Passages are set open on every side. And then *WOE* comes, and *DOWN-CUTTING* comes, and *CASTING OUT* comes.

4. Then present *Impurity* is no Evidence of future *Immunity*; thou may'st stand in the Vineyard the first, second, and third Year, and the Ax may never come nigh thee all that while, to cut down one Bough, or hew off one Chip, and yet after that thou may'st go down altogether. [*CUT-IT DOWN*] comes not till Patience be done, and quite worn out; and Patience, that is not out to day, may be over to morrow. *Boast not thy self of to morrow, for thou knowest not what a Day may bring forth,* Prov. 27. 1.

5. What a desperate and dangerous Case impenitent and unprofitable Persons are lying in from Day to Day; there is nothing but the long-suffering of God between them and *DOWN-CUTTING*. If these shut up, these poor Creatures are gone, everlastingly gone in a Moment; and this may shut up in a moment, may expire while thou art walking on the way, or talking with thy Friend, or sleeping in thy Bed, and one sudden Blow may lay thee along. O think of it!

6. Be-

6. Beware of sinning the Patience of God to an end; if thou dost this, thy end will border thereon. The old World, *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, *Pharoah*, the *Canaanites* and *Israel*, sinned the Patience of God to an end. And then came their end, as soon as the long-suffering of God was out. Yea, and know this, Soul, that the longer God forbears, that the more heavy and dreadful the stroke will be when it comes. *Patientia lusa fit furor, ad pœnam tardus Deus est, ad prœmia velox. Sed per sarcine solet vi graviore moram.* See that forenam'd Text, *Isa. 42. 14.* Now will I cry like a travelling Woman, I will destroy and devour at once. O think what came on the old World, *Sodom*, *Egypt* and *Jerusalem*, after great long-suffering! 1. What time the Patience of God towards them came to an end; and learn, I say, to beware of sinning the Patience of God to an end.

7. See what need all impenitent unprofitable Persons have to hasten their Repentance. If there be nothing but the Patience of God between you and *Cutting-Down*, then you have need to make haste; for you know not when, at what Day, or in what Hour this may expire; and if the ending of this find you empty, then *Actum est*, all's at an end, and down you must. O let this be a Spur to speedy Repentance, and Fruitfulness. You may be going

going on the last Year, the last Week, nay, the last Day of the Lord's Patience; therefore Delays may be very dangerous. As *John* said to the boasting *Jews*, *The Ax* Mat. 3. 10. *is laid unto the Root of the Trees*; so I may say unto every unprofitable, unfruitful Person, for any thing thou knowest, the Ax is now laid unto thy Root, ready to hew thee down, and then to be cast into the Fire. Now, I say, therefore hasten thy Repentance.

8. What unprofitable People are at this Day owing to, for the Room that they hold in the Vineyard; (that is to say) the Patience and Long suffering of God. *Sirs, England* is owing to this, for the Privileges and Advantages that it enjoys in the Vineyard, and the particular Congregations in *England* owing to this; and we are owing to this, even the Patience of God towards us, that only stands between us and Down-cutting. This is the Fourth Observation.

5thly, Observe, *That the Lord comes with his Basket to a People before he comes with his Ax*, i. e. A seeking Fruit, ere he come on felling down. Here he would come over and over again with the Basket, before ever he come with a CUT IT DOWN.

1. What it is that the Lord would find among a People; viz. Fruitfulness in Good-

The Barren Fig-Tree.

Goodness: This is it that he's for. As the Lord of the Vineyard had rather find his Trees doing well, and yielding him Fruit, than empty, and such as are fit for nothing but **DOWN-CUTTING**; so the God of Heaven had rather find a People planted in his Church, doing well, and yeilding the Fruits of Faith and Repentance, than barren and empty, fit for nothing, but to be hewn down, and cast into the Fire.

2. That the Perdition of Sinners is of themselves; it's their own Barrenness that ruins them. As the Psalmist speaks, *Fools, because of their Transgression, and because of their Iniquities, are afflicted*, Psal. 107. 17. So may I say, Sinners, because of their Barrenness, are *Cut down*.

3. That *Fruitfulness* is the only way to prevent *Down-cutting*. If we would not fall by the *Ax*, we must fill the *Basket*.

6thly, Observe, *That Vineyard Trees, which are not for Fruit, must be for Fire.* [Cut it down for the Fire, for Burning.] This is another.

We are all as so many Trees in the Lord's Vineyard; and, Sirs, we are every one for the one of these, *Fruit* or *Fuel*. If not for Fruit now in this World, then for Fire in the next World. This our Saviour plainly shews us in that before-mentioned Text, *Mat. 7. 19. Every Tree that bringeth*

bringeth not forth good Fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the Fire. And John, Mat. 3. 10. This is frequently shadowed out unto us in the Scripture: As in the

1. Tares, *Mat. 13. 30. Let both grow together until the Harvest, and in the time of Harvest I will say unto the Reapers, Gather ye together first the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them.*

2. The evil Servant. *But, and if that evil Servant shall say in his Heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his Fellow-servant, &c. — The Lord of that Servant — shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his Portion with the Hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth, Mat. 24. 51.*

3. The unprofitable Servant, *Mat. 25. 30. Cast ye the unprofitable Servant into outer Darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth.*

4. By the withered Branch, *John 15. 6. If a Man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a Branch, and is withered, and Men gather them, and cast them into the Fire, and they are burned.*

5. The Barren Earth, *Heb. 6. 7, 8. The Earth which drinketh in the Rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth Herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth Blessing from God. But that which beareth Thorns and Briars is rejected, and is nigh unto Cursing, whose end is to be burned.*

All

The Barren Fig-Tree.

All these speak the same thing, and shew us the sake and end of all unprofitable Persons, and impenitent Sinners, who are to be cut down, and cast into the Fire. And is it so? Then we may hence see,

1. What sad things Barrenness is a Fore-runner of, and as a Harbinger unto. (That is to say) Destruction, a Fire, a Fire never to be quenched, is at the Back of every barren Tree; and when it goes down, it drops into it. This is that which Barrenness presages.

2. What Matter of trembling this may be to many People in these Days. Must they that are barren be for the Fire, cut down for Fuel? Then many and many a poor unprofitable Creature may justly tremble this Day to think what is coming upon them. O! is it not a fearful thing to be cast as Logs into the Fire, and be set all on a Blaze there. Why, alas, this is it, that many fair Vineyard-Trees are like to be for the Fire.

3. The Necessity that lyes on us to be fruitful, if we will not be for the Fire. This is necessary; for there are no middle Trees that are for neither, but all are for the one or the other, Fruit or Fuel. If we be not of that make, we can on no fashion scape, but we must be of this; there is no choice afore us, save one of these two. As *Deut. 30. 15. See I have set before thee this Day Life and Good, Death*
and

and Evil. So I may say, there is no other choice for us, but one of these two, either Life or Death, Good or Evil, Blessing or Cursing, to be for Fruit, or for Fuel.

4. What a blessed thing it is to be fruitful like the Trees of Paradise, pleasant to the Sight, and good for Food. Oh to be thus fruitful is a blessed thing! It's this you see that prevents DOWN-CUTTING, and OFF-CUTTING. Gen. 2. 9.

7thly, Observe, *That Persons may stand and flourish long, that are for the Fire in the end.* This Tree (representing the People) had held its room Three Years, yet was now for DOWN-CUTTING. Many a fair Tree, that had stood this Year, and that Year, spreading abroad her Boughs and Leaves, has gone to the Fire the next Year; so many Persons may flourish for the present, (this was David's Observation, *Psal. 37. 35, 36.*) *That have been in great Power, and spread themselves like the Bay-tree. Yet they are passed away, and lo they they are not; yea, they have been sought, but they could not be found.* I sought him, but he was quite gone. The Assyrian was a fair spreading Tree, yet went down wonderfully, *Ezek. 31. 34. Behold the Assyrian was a Cedar in Lebanon with fair Branches, and with a shadowing Shrowd, and of an high Stature, and his Top was among the thick Boughs, &c.* My beloved, Persons

Persons may stand and flourish mightily Year after Year, in

1. Estate, Riches, Honour, Name, and Friends in the World, may have a constant and continual Flux of these, and Cups running over: And,

2. Profession, and Growth therein, as Willows by the Water-courses, sending out their Branches, and spreading their Leaves on every side; and yet after all, and in the end of all, go to the Fire. As the *Psal-*

Psal. 73.

mist observes in his time, (which even stumbled the Holy Man) *The wicked were great and prosperous in the World: They have no Bands in their Death, they are not in Trouble—nor plagued like other Men. Their Eyes stand out with Fatness, and Waters of a full Cup are wrung out to them, and they have more than Heart can wish. But what was the end of all this? Why, Destruction. V. 18. Surely thou didst set them in slippery Places, thou didst cast them down into Destruction.— They are brought into Desolation, as in a moment they are utterly consumed with Terrors.— When thou awakest thou shalt despise their Image.* Thus Job also observed; read

Job 21.

Luke 16.

19.

Chap. 21. Remember (*Luke* 16. 19.) the Parable of the rich Glutton. Job concludes from the greenness of the Rush, while growing; but when once Moisture fails, it quickly withereth. — So (says he, *ver.*

Job 8. 13.

13.) *are the Paths of all that forget God, and*

and the Hypocrites Hopes shall perish. See then,

1. That bare Prosperity and Success in this World is no sufficient Evidence of a good Condition. Many People are ready to persuade themselves, that God is pleased with them, and all's well; because they stand and grow, and things go well with them in the Earth: But alas, Soul, this is but a sorry Ground to bottom such a Persuasion on, thou may'st stand, and stand in the Vineyard Year after Year, and yet be for the Fire in the end. Yea, oftentimes the Lord uses not the Rod, nor the Pruning Hook, where he will use the Ax, but lets such Trees alone, till they be ready for Down-Cutting.

2. That all those are not well that are for the present in a fine and flourishing Case. When *Belshazar* was in the top of his Prosperity, the Hand of God was writing very terrible things against him. When this Tree was sunning it self in the Vineyard, and lifting up its Head among the rest of the Trees, God was signing a Warrant for its CUTTING-DOWN. And this, Sirs, is the Case of many, and many a one, who are at present flourishing, and prosperous in the World. So that all is not well with those that prosper for the present.

E

3. That

3. That Persons may come to very sad Ends after that they have flourished long in the World. My Beloved, whatever has gone before, this **DOWN-CUTTING** will be a woful End; and it's not so sad, but many a fair and tall Tree may, and does come to it. *For the Day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low: And upon all the Cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the Oaks of Bashan: And upon all the high Mountains, and upon all the Hills that are lifted up, &c.* Isa. 2. 12, 13, 14. So, Sirs, there will be a Day of the Lord upon many a Cedar of Lebanon, and upon many an Oak of Bashan; i. e. upon many a flourishing Person, that has prospered long in the World. I say, there will be a Day upon many of these; a Day of **DOWN-CUTTING**, a Day of **OUT-CASTING**. O think of it, and look too, that you go not down for one! For many a fair and fine Tree must down, and to the Fire.

4. Rest not in a flourishing State and Condition in the World, thou knowest not what it may end in: Nay, if there be not something better, something between God and thee, this will be the end; after thou hast stood awhile, as thou art, down thou must. Sirs, if we could see into the Pit, we might see more than a few,

few, all on a light Fire, and flaming there, that were fine Trees while they stood here in the Vineyard. Rest not in a flourishing State and Condition in this World.

5. Envy not, but pity poor prospering Sinners. O, when your Hearts would grudge at them, remember this; (that is to say) that Trees may stand long in the Vineyard, and yet be for the Fire at last; and that these are of this Make, *Job 24.*

24. They are exalted for a little while, but are gone, and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the Ears of Corn. Psal.

92. 7. When the wicked sprung as the Grass, and when all the Workers of Iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever. Let this quiet thee;

the Lord proposes it as a quieting Consideration, *Psal. 37. 1. Fret not thy self, because of evil Doers, neither be thou envious against the Workers of Iniquity. But why? v. 2. For they shall soon be cut down like the Grass, and wither as the green Herb.*

Nay, the Lord himself bears on this account. *V. 13. The Lord shall laugh at him; for he seeth that his Day is coming,*

and therefore bears, and may it not thou much more bear.

This is the Seventh, think on it; and as oft as you see a piece of Wood come to the Fire, let this be your Thoughts: This was once a spacious Tree, that stood many

a day in such and such a Place, and was cloath'd with Bark, adorn'd with Branches and Leaves, but the Ax has pass'd on it, and it's in the Fire. This is an Emblem of the Condition of many poor Creatures. I had need look too, that it prove not mine.

8thly, Observe, *That wicked and prophane Persons, who are placed within the Lord's Vineyard, shall meet with certain DOW-N-CUTTING.* [Cut it down.] What must be Cut down? Why, the empty Fig-tree; this must down, and out of the Vineyard. Now, my Beloved, if a barren Fig-tree must not tarry in the Vineyard, then surely the Briar and the Thorn must in no wise tarry there; he that will not suffer a barren Fig-tree, that's empty of good Fruit, to stand there, will never suffer a bad Tree, that's loaden with ill Fruit, to keep its room there. Briars, Brambles, and Thorns, shall not stand there where Fig-trees go down. This is certain, *Psal. 9: 17. The Wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the Nations that forget God.* *Psal. 37: 38. The Transgressors shall be destroyed together, the end of the Wicked shall be cut off.* And says *Job, Chap. 31. 3. Let not Destruction to the Wicked, and a strange Punishment to the Workers of Iniquity.* *Eccles. 8. 12. Though a Sinner do Evil an hundred times, and his Days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them.*

them that fear God. Mat. 13. 40, 41, 42. As therefore (says our Saviour) the Tares are gathered and burnt in the Fire, so shall it be in the end of the World. The Son of Man shall send forth his Angels, and they shall gather out of his Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do Iniquity, and shall cast them into a Furnace of Fire. My Beloved, pray consider it.

1. There are many, very many of this sort of Trees risen up in the Vineyard at this Day among us. The Vineyard is not only cumbered with many barren Trees, but sadly pestered with many bad Trees. These are thronging in every part, it's overgrown with Roots that bear Gall and Wormwood. O there are many Vineyard Trees, whereof the Lord may say, (as Mic. 7. 4.) *The best of them is as a Briar, and the most upright is sharper than a Thorn-Hedge. And (as Deut. 32. 32.) their Vine is of the Vine of Sodom, and of the Field of Gomorrah; their Grapes are Grapes of Gall, their Clusters are bitter. They are like Jeremiah's Basket of Figs, very naughty, which could not be eaten, they were so bad, Jer. 24. 1, 2. So, my Beloved, are there not many Trees in the Vineyard, whose Fruit is so naughty, that they cannot be eaten they are so bad? Alas, is not Uncleaness, Drunkenness, Oaths, Looseness of Life, the Fruit that Abundance of Trees are laden with Year*

The Barren Fig-Tree.

after Year? O there are many of this sort!

2. As there are many such Trees, so we may in this Truth, as in a Glass, see evidently what will come on them, and on our selves, if we be of them. The barren Tree must down, and shall the bad Tree stand? O look at this *falling Fig tree*! And if thou be a *Loose, a Prophane, a Vile Person*, thou mayst therein foresee thine own Fate and Fall. The *Fig tree* that, 1. Bears no *Noxious, Hurtful, and Naughty Fruits*. 2. Beautified with many fair Leaves of a Profession; but is, 3. empty of Goodness, must Down, how canst thou reckon to *Stand*? Alas, thou canst not! Beware of such palpable notorious Delusion. It's the Lord's own Charge, *1 Cor. 6. 9. Know ye not that the Unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Be not deceived; neither Fornicators, nor Idolaters, nor Adulterers, nor Effeminate, nor Abusers of themselves with Mankind, nor Thieves, nor Covetous, nor Drunkards, nor Revilers, nor Extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God. Eph. 5. 3, 4, 5, 6. But Fornication, and all Uncleanness, or Covetousness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh Saints. Neither Filthiness, nor Foolish Talking, nor Jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of Thanks. For this ye know, that no Whoremonger, nor unclean Person, nor*

covet-

covetous Man, who is an Idolater, hath any Inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ, and of God. Let no Man deceive you with vain Words; for because of these things cometh the Wrath of God upon the Children of Disobedience. Be not deceived, for because of these things cometh the Wrath of God. Let no Man deceive you. The Caution and Warning imports, that such Sinners are apt to flatter themselves, and are ready to hearken to the Flattery of others, but will in the end of all find themselves deceived to their utter and endless undoing.

3. *That the wicked must turn or die. Art thou an ungodly Man or Woman? Why, this Truth brings thee these Tidings this Day. Pray take notice of it; God's Ax will surely make a Riddance of every Briar and Thorn out of the Vineyard; if it find thee such a one, down thou goest. Psal. 7. 11, 12, 13. God judgeth the Righteous, and God is angry with the Wicked every Day. If he turn not, he will whet his Sword: He hath bent his Bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the Instruments of Death; he ordaineth his Arrows against the Persecutors. Isa. 9. 18. For Wickedness burneth as the Fire; it shall devour the Briers and Thorns, and shall kindle in the Thickets of the Forrest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of Smoak, i. e. Peccatores & impios.*

9thly, Observe, *That the Lord spares some for a Time, that deserve D O W N-CUTTING.* People may deserve to be *Cut down*, and yet be passed by for a Season. This Fig tree deserved to be cut down the first Year, yet it stood the second, and after that the third Year, e'er the Charge comes. Many a one stands on this Fashion many a Year after there is Matter enough of *Condemnation*, and *Down-cutting*.

1. That God does not always take Sinners at the first, as soon as there is cause, and they are worthy.

2. We may not think that we are right, because we are spared. No, no, we may be far enough from that: we may stand, and yet deserve *D O W N-CUTTING* all that while: Yea, and come to *D O W N-CUTTING* at last.

3. What many poor Sinners owe their standing unto, *Mercy, Mercy*, Lam. 3.22. It is of the Lord's Mercies that we are not consum'd; so may thou and I say, that thou standest, and standest when many another goes down, may not be, because they were worse deserving than thou art, but from *sparing Mercy*. No doubt but many a Tree in the Forrest went down in the Three Years that this stood in the Vineyard, that deserved as well to have kept their room as this.

It's

It's not Desert in them, but Mercy in God, that keeps *Nations, Congregations, Families, and Persons* up, when others go down about them. As our Saviour told them that the *Galileans* were not greater Sinners than others, because they suffered such things; so I say, that those which are cut down, may not be, because they were worse deserving than those that stand up, but from sparing Mercy, whereby the one is kept up, when the other is cut down and perished.

Luke 13.
2, 3.

10thly, Observe, *That tho' an unprofitable People may be spared for a time, yet they have no Advantage thereby, if they continue in their Unprofitableness.* This Stay, this Delay, is no Advantage to them, they have no Benefit by it, are no better for it in the end, if they be not better'd by it. This Fig-tree deserved to be *Cut down* the first Year, yet it stood the second and third Year; but it's no better for this, still it must down: And tho' it was begg'd off another Year longer, (as you see) yet this was no Advantage neither, DOWN it went at last. So that I say, *Though a Sinner do Evil an Hundred times, and his Days be prolonged, i.e.* Eccles. 8.
12, 13.
If he continue long, and stand many Days, yet it shall not be well with him, neither shall he prolong his Days, which are as a Shadow; i. e. Shall not stand for ever, but come to Down cutting he must. His long

long Days are but a short Life, like a shadow that vanishes to nothing. And says the Prophet, — *The Sinner being an Hundred Years old, shall be accursed, (id est) Quam diu cunq; vita ejus per patientiam dei prolongetur Maledictus Tamen, tandem evadet.* We see that old Trees that die on the Ground where they have grown, and fall down for Age, are yet hewn in pieces, and hurried Piece after Piece to the Fire. Yea, these (of all others) are fit for nothing but Fire, can hardly serve for any other use. So, Sirs, how long soever unprofitable Persons may stand, if they remain so, their standing will be no Advantage to them; it's only a little time that they have more than others; but *Down*, and to the Fire they must; that will be their End. Then,

1. That to live many Days, and have a long time in the Vineyard (in case Persons be barren) is no great Matter. There are some carnal old Men, who are forward to glory in their long standing, and gray Hairs; but alas, this glorying is vain, *Bonum vite non est positum in spacio ejus sed in use.* It's an Honour indeed to be an old Disciple: *And the hoary Head is a Crown of Glory, if it be found in the way of Righteousness.* But if otherwise, thou beest an old Shrub, that hast stood long, but never borne any Fruit; thou art never the better, but the worse for thy Age.

2. What

Prov. 16.
31.

2. What need we have to improve the Time of God's sparing Mercy. Hast thou been of a long time an unprofitable Plant in the Lord's Vineyard? One that has stood empty there many a day? Is the Lord yet sparing thee? Then let us quicken thee to improve this time, else this time that thou art spared, when others are *Cut down*, will be no Advantage unto thee; nay, thou wilt be the worse for it in the end. Consider this, if thou continue barren, the longer thou art spared, the sadder Matters will be when thou com'st at last to this **DOWNCUTTING**: For the longer thou art spared, and the greater the Mercy thou enjoyest, the greater will thy Account be in the end. And,

1. *The more heavy Displeasure of God will fall upon thee.* When the Lord bears long with a Nation, or Congregation, or Person, and all does no good, then *His Wrath* waxes hot against them. 1. We may see it in reference to a People, in that Threatning denounced, *Lam. 2. 2. The Lord hath swallowed up all the Habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied, — He hath polluted the Kingdom, and the Princes thereof. He hath cut off in his fierce Anger all the Horn of Israel; — And he burned against Jacob like a flaming Fire, which devoureth round about.* He had waited long, and now at last, when he begins with them, you see how it is: —
He

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He burned against Jacob like a flaming Fire — 2. We may see it in reference to a Person, in that, *Psal. 50. 21. These things hast thou done, and I kept Silence,— but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine Eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, as a Lion, and there be none to deliver.* O the Anger of the Lord is hot against, and heavy on old withered Trees, that have stood long to no purpose. It were better in this respect to be cut done while but a green Twig, than when a grown and old Tree. *Nahum 1. 2.* it's said, *He reserveth Wrath for his Enemies, i. e.* He stores and lays it up, as Men do their Treasures, and as a Treasure it is growing every Day. So that the longer thou art spared, the more heavy Displeasure of God will fall upon thee, if thou continuest a barren Tree in his Vineyard, *Isa. 42. 14.*

2. *The more will thy Sin be, while thou art standing empty in the Vineyard.* Why, the Lord's Displeasure is coming upon thee, and thy Sin is increasing, and multiplying continually every Day, and every Opportunity is adding to the Heap, and thou'lt have more Sin to fall with, more Guilt to fall and lye under for ever.

3. *Thy Accompts will be greater, and thy Score run to a paster Sum.* Thou wilt have, 1. More time to reckon for. 2. More Sabbaths

Sabbaths to account for. 3. More Sermons to give an account of. And, 4. The Labours of more of the Lord's Vine-dressers to account for. Thy Accompts are running on from Day to Day, and this will be sad when the counting Day comes. The time will come when thou wilt wish (on this account) that thou had'st not stood half, nor a quarter of the time in the Vineyard, as thou hast stood in it empty and unprofitable.

4. *The more will thy Heart be hardened, and confirmed in Evil.* How long soever thou may'st tarry in the Vineyard, yet if thou be not brought unto Fruitfulness, thou wilt be worse. Where the *Word is not the Savour of Life unto Life*, — there, by accident, *it is the Savour of Death unto Death*, 2 Cor. 2. 16. As it is with crabby and knotty Trees, the longer they grow, the more knotty and crabbed they are, and require more Blows to CUTTING-DOWN, more Wedges for riving and making them ready for the Fire; so it is with unprofitable Persons in the Lord's Vineyard.

5. *The more will thy Inexcusableness be at the last.* This is another. If the Lord suffer thee to stand long, this long standing will leave thee no Excuse; nothing, nothing in the World to say for thy self at last, when he is laying the Ax to the Root, and cutting thee down. O!

Sirs,

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Sirs, none go down with Mouths so shut and stop't, nay, seal'd up as those that have stood a long time empty in the Vineyard.

1. They can have nothing to say. 2. No Body can have any thing to say for them.

3. The Dresser cannot put in a Word more for the Tree that's spared the fourth Year, and brings no Fruit. If the Lord had cut thee down the first Year, thou mightest have said, If I had been but spared one Year longer, I might have borne Fruit; but now thou wilt have no Excuse, seeing he has spared thee not only the first, second and third, but the fourth Year also, and yet thou art unfruitful.

6. Thy Shame will be greater when thou art cut down. *Barrenness is a great Reproach and Disgrace to Fields and Trees; especially to Vineyard Trees, that are planted in a fat and fertile Soil.* This makes them contemptible in the Eyes of the Master and Keepers, and of all Comers into the Vineyard. No Body sets any Store by them, or puts any Price on them: So, Sirs, Barrenness is a mighty Disgrace to Persons that live under the Gospel, tho' many are no more sensible of it, than the Trees that have no Sense. And the longer thou standest without Fruit, the greater will thy Shame be in the end, in the sight of all that shall look upon thee.

7. Thy

7. *Thy Fall and Condemnation will be greater and sadder.* This is another. A tender Sprout may be cut down without any Noise or Notice; but an old Tree that has stood long, spread its Boughs far abroad, and lifted up its Head to a great height, when it comes to felling, makes a great noise, and gives a mighty crash at its fall. So thy Fall will be the greater; as it is said of the *Assyrian*, (Ezek. 31.6.) *I made the Nations to shake at the sound of his Fall, when I cast him down to Hell with them that descend into the Pit.* The great, the great Damnation will fall upon these; their Hell will be a double Hell, the young and tender Twigs will but smok there, (as we may say) but these old Logs, of many Years growth, will make a mighty Flame, and blaze for ever. Think of this whilst thou standest impenitent and unprofitable in the Vineyard from Year to Year: Thou art *Treasuring up unto thy self Wrath against the Day of Wrath*; i. e. That Sin, Rom. 2. 5. that will make thy Judgment more heavy, thy Condemnation more grievous, and thy Hell more hot and intollerable for ever, as one that hath of a long time been wearing the Patience of God, and frustrating the Pains of his *Vine-dressers*.

Well, Sirs, pray think at this; lay these Seven things together, and you may see from them that it will be no Advantage to you to be spared, and stand a long time in

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in the Vineyard, unless you be brought unto Fruitfulness thereby. If no *Fruit*, no *Mercy*. Why? 1. Because God will be more Angry. 2. Thy Sin more aggravated. 3. Thy Accompts greater. 4. Thy Heart harder. 5. Thou more inexcusable. 6. Thy Shame greater. 7. Thy Fall sadder. So that it may be matter of Fear and Trembling unto us, to think of standing long in the Vineyard, only as Trees that take room. Alas! that Room (tho we have no Advantage by it) is choice Room, and Room that we must pay dear for at last.

3. We pass now unto the Third Thing in this Fifth Part of this Parable, *viz.*

To whom he gave it in Charge, to see the Sentence executed on this barren Fig-tree; and that was the Dresser, v. 7. Then said he unto the Dresser of his Vineyard—Cut it down.— This is here spoken, and given in Charge to the *Dresser of the Vineyard*, suitable unto the foregoing part of the Parable: For otherwise in Strictness of Speech, it's not the Minister's Work, but the MASTER'S [the Lord's Work] to CUT DOWN unprofitable Persons. And therefore in the end of the Parable, *v. 9.—Let it alone, Lord, (says the Dresser) this Year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it. And if it bear Fruit, well,*
and

and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. Yet after a sort, and in a Sense, Ministers are DOWN-CUTTERS of unprofitable Impenitent Persons in the Church.

1. The Lord may be said to Cut down unfruitful unprofitable Persons, when he either,

1. Casts them out of the Vineyard, drives them out of his House, and from under his Ordinances.

2. Or lays waste the Vineyard where they stand, and turns it into a Forrest, as you may see in that Parable, *Isa. 5. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.*—*I will tell you what I will do to my Vineyard; I will take away the Hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up, and break down the Wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down. And I will lay it waste, it shall not be pruned, nor digged—And your House shall be left unto you desolate, Matth. 23. 38.*

3. Or, when he actually cuts them down by Death, and leaves them to fall into the Pit. Thus when the Lord comes upon an unprofitable People or Person, and drives them out of his House, or shifts away his Ordinances from them; that is one degree of DOWN-CUTTING: and when he comes and knocks them down by Sickness, or sweeps them away by his judgments; that is another degree; and is the final and falling Stroke to them, at

which they tumble down to Destruction. Now,

2. The Dressers of the Vineyard, *i. e.* the Ministers, may be said to CUT DOWN, as they are sent, and come from the Lord, to declare and denounce these things to an unprofitable People. Thus the Lord declares, *Jer. 1. 10. See, I have this Day set thee over the Nations, and over the Kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down* — The Lord saith to the Prophet, *See, &c. i. e.* Declaratively, by declaring and denouncing of my Judgments against them. So *Ezek. 43. 3. — According to the Vision that I saw, when I came to destroy the City.* (That is) when I came to shew that the City should be destroyed. And so the Dressers, when they come to declare in the Preaching of the Word, that they shall be CUT DOWN. Thus you see how the Ministers of the Gospel may be said to CUT DOWN unprofitable and unfruitful Persons. Now from this we may observe,

First, That the Lord sometimes sends his Servants (after they have spent much Time and Pains among a People) on sad Errands, and with sad Messages to that People for their Unprofitableness. Thus it was here; the Dresser of the Vineyard, after Three Years Labour in the Vineyard, is now sent to be the sad Messenger of
hea-

heavy Tidings to this Fig-tree, and to denounce DOWN-CUTTING against it. Of this we have many Instances, what sad Messages have the Servants of the Lord come with. You may see, *Isa. 22. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 58. 1. Jer. 7. 20. Ezek. 15. 6, 7, 8. and 21. 2, 3. Amos 8. 2, 3, 11, 12. Mal. 4. 1.* Yea, our blessed Saviour, who was Anointed to preach the Gospel to the Poor --- To heal the broken-hearted, to preach Deliverance to the Captives, and recovering of Sight to the Blind, to set at Liberty them that were bruised, to preach the acceptable Year of the Lord --- Luke 4. 18, 19. yet came with one sad Word after another to this People for Impenitency and Unprofitableness. *Mat. 11. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24.* it is said, *He upbraided the Cities wherein most of his mighty Works were done, because they repented not, and pronounced a Wo against them ---* And for this their Unprofitableness he tells them, *That the Kingdom of God should be taken from them, and given to a Nation, that would bring forth the Fruits thereof, Mat. 21. 43.* And the like sad Message he brings to them, *Mat. 23. 38, 39. and Luke 19. 41, 42.*

1. What it is that puts sad Messages into Ministers Mouths? It is this, the Unprofitableness and Sinfulness of the People, they are sent unto. This, this often makes them to come weeping unto us, and puts

Messages into their Hands, like the ROLL that was put into *Ezekiel's* Hand, *Chap. 2. 9, 10.* O Sirs! the Work, the most proper Work of an Ambassador of *Jesus Christ*, is to bring good Tidings. But as the Carriage of the *Galatians* put the Holy Apostle upon changing his Voice, *Ch. 4. 20.* so the Sins of the People often put the faithful Servant of *Christ* upon sharp and cutting Work. They must do it whoever it displeased, if they will discharge their TRUST, be faithful to their Master, and true to the Interest of the Souls they have the Oversight of.

2. You that are barren and unprofitable, may see what Tidings you may expect the Lord's Ambassadors to come with unto you. Sad Tidings, heavy Messages, one heavy Message after another. This you may expect, and look for from them. They come preaching Peace by *Jesus Christ*, and bring many sweet and comfortable Messages to the penitent Believer, and fruitful Persons: But alas! if you be impenitent and unprofitable, no Word of this belongs to you; you have no Part nor Lot in this Matter; you do but deceive your selves, when you so take it to your selves, and think it belongs to you. No, Sirs, the part that belongs to you lyes in the sad, in the trembling part of their Message, in their Work, that is DOWN-CUTTING Work; they can come with

no other Tidings to you than those our Saviour came with here, v. 3. and 5. *I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* Or to tell you of any better things (if you remain unprofitable) than of DOWN-CUTTING, certain, unavoidable, utter and everlasting DOWN-CUTTING. And to come with smooth and filken Words to you, and tell you of Good that is towards you (while you remain unprofitable) would be the way to seal you up under Delusion, till you be quite down, and past all Possibility of Recovery.

3. Then the Ministers of Christ, after much time spent among a People, and great Pains taken with them, may be put to leave them very sadly, with very heavy and weary Tidings. Many times a Man plants a Tree in his Vineyard, and nourishes it there Year after Year, does all that he can to have Fruit of it; and yet when all is done, he is forced with his own Hands to *Hew down this Tree, and burry it out.* So here the Ministers of Christ, after much Pains with a People, and great Labours about Persons to do them Good, are often put to leave them with sad Hearts, and sad News of DOWN-CUTTING. A very unwelcome and unpleasing Work to them. You have seen how our Saviour after all his mighty Works that he had done amongst them,

was put to leave *Chorazin, Bethsaida, Ferusalem, Capernaum*, under a WO, with sad News of total Ruin and Destruction. Why, let's think of it. It's sad to them, that Christ sends to us, to leave any of them they come unto, on this Fashion, with WO! O, but it will be sad to Purpose with those whom they leave on such a fashion: And it were better that we had never been born, than that they who have come, bringing us Tidings of *Life, and Light, and Glory*, from time to time, should (because we have not hearkened unto them) bring and leave us with Tidings of **DOWN-CUTTING** and **DEATH**.

Secondly, Observe, *That Ministers cut down barren Trees in his Vineyard*, [Then said he unto the Dresser of his Vineyard, *Cut it down.*] This is one part of their Work, as they are sent into the Vineyard to plant, and to water, so to pluck up, and cut down. They thus Cut down (as Ministers of Christ) Ministerially, and Declaratively, by Declaring and Denouncing **DOWN-CUTTING** against them. Hence the Lord is said to have *hewed them by the Prophets* --- *Hosea 6. 5.* As the Master of the Vineyard hews down Trees by the Hand of his Servants, and the Word of the Lord is resembled to an Ax, *Matth. 3. 10.* And as an Ax is an Instrument to hew down

down Trees, so the Word of the Lord is as an Ax, whereby they cut down barren and unprofitable Persons. See,

1. That when the Ministers of Christ come unto an unprofitable People, they then come a CUTTING DOWN; to cut down their Unprofitableness, Sinfulness, Infidelity and Disobedience. And if this be not done, to cut down their Souls; if those go not down before the Ax, these must. Consider it, Sirs, you have the Ministers of the Word among you, and now one of these must down; viz. your Sins, or your Souls; if those fall not, these must.

2. Are you unprofitable? Then think of this, when the Dressers of the Vineyard are denouncing, and laying open the Threatnings of God against unprofitable and barren Persons. You are then a cutting down, I say, you are even then under the Ax; and every Reproof, every Conviction, every cutting Sermon is as a Blow towards bringing you down; yea, and tho' you may be like bulky and knotty Trees, and abide many and many a Blow e'er you come down, yet know this, Down you must at last. For,

Thirdly, Observe, That when the Lord sends his Servants to cut down unprofitable Trees that stand in his Vineyard, those Trees shall certainly come down accord-

ing to their Word; they pronounce Down-cutting, sub suis Conditionibus, and accordingly they are at last cut down.

This is a Third, therefore their Denunciation is here called a **CUTTING DOWN**, because cutting down will certainly follow thereon: And what they, according to the VVord, and from the VVord, do thus declare and denounce to unprofitable Persons, shall be as surely fulfilled on them, as if it were forthwith put into Execution. My Beloved, the Dressers of the Vineyard do but deliver the VVord, I, but he who sends them will do the VVork, and perform the VVord of his Servants; so as nothing shall fall to the Ground without the VVill of him that sends them. *The Lord who sends them is he that conformeth the Word of his Servant, and performeth the Counsel of his Messengers---* The Jews found this before the Captivity, (wherein the Vineyard was laid waste) as in that foremention'd Parable, *Isa. 5. 5, 6, 7.* The Lord sent his Prophets to 'em one after another, to *Cut down*; that is, to denounce and declare this threatening of God against them. And this came upon them, as the Lord shews their Posterity, *Zach. 1. 4, 5, 6.* VVhen he cautions them, that they should not be as their Fathers, unto whom the former Prophets had cried, that they should turn from their evil VVays, and from their evil

Isa. 44. 26.

evil Doings, but they did not hear; which he amplifies by way of Interrogation ----- *Your Fathers, where are they? And the Prophets, do they live for ever?* As tho' he should say, Tho' your Fathers died, and the Prophet *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, &c.* died, yet my Word did not fall to the Ground, but that barren Tree was cut down. This he convinces them of, 1. By Experience, and notorious Evidence of the Fact, [did they live for ever?] *q. d.* I appeal to your own Experience. 2. By their own Confession. *They return'd and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our Ways, and according to our Doings, so hath he dealt with us.* As you may see, *Lam. 2. 17.* *The Lord hath done that which he had devised: he hath fulfilled his Word that he had commanded in the Days of old; he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied; and he hath caused thine Enemy to rejoice over thee; he hath set up the Horn of thine Adversaries.*

The old World thus came down according to the preaching of *Noah* and *Nineveh*, (tho' it was reprieved for a time) according to the preaching of *Jonah*. And thus, Sirs, when the Lord sends his Servants to Cut down unprofitable Trees that stand in his Vineyard, those Trees shall certainly come down according to their Word.

I. How

The Barren Fig-Tree.

1. How the sad Messages, which the Lord's Servants bring unto a Person or a People should be received; *viz.* with fear and trembling, as so many Strokes of that Ax that never misses. It is said of *Josiah*, that when he had heard the Words of the Book of the Law, that he rent his Cloaths, *2 Kings* 22. 11. So, my Beloved, when we hear the sad Messages which the Lord's Servants bring, we should tremble, lest the Ax come with its last Blow, and hew us up, and we be cast out of the Lord's Vineyard as barren and unprofitable Trees.

2. Why the sad Messages that the Lord's Servants bring are commonly so little heeded? *Viz.* from People's Infidelity. They do not believe the Report of the Lord's Servants. They will not believe that they shall be cut down; even then, when the Lord is hewing them by his Prophets. This is the great Ground of the Security of Congregations, and the Carelessness of poor unprofitable Persons, when, and while many a felling Blow is given to them. Oh! if the Tidings that Vineyard-dressers come with to dry Trees, were indeed believed, what Work would it make? But alas, there is no heeding, because no believing. Ministers may tell unprofitable Persons of *Cutting down*, and they are no more moved than if they were Trees.

3. What

3. What cause we have to heed and mind the sad Message, that the Lord's Servants bring unto us from him. Sirs, there is never a sad Word that they speak in our Ears from the Word of the Lord; but if we be of the Persons that it belongs unto, the Lord will confirm it, and do the Work; not a Word to unprofitable Persons; but if we be unprofitable, it shall come upon us; not a Word to Drunkards, but if we be drinking to Excess, it will overtake us: Not a Word to Covetousness; but if we be covetous Persons, it belongs to us.

4. What sad Work is to be done upon impenitent and unprofitable ones. O Sirs, there's many and many a poor Creature who thinks not of it, that has sad things coming on: All that the Vine-dressers tell them of; all that the Holy Scripture makes report of unto them, will come: *Death* will come, and *Darkness* will come, and *Burning* will come, and *Wo* upon *VVo*, without end, will come. O what an End! what a doleful End is before poor Sinners! And what a Day, what a doleful Day will that Day be, in which the Lord shall confirm the Word of the Messengers, whom he's now sending unto them.

5. What we may fear in our Land at this Day, for our great and long-continued Unprofitableness in the Vineyard, and under the Gospel. My Beloved, many of the Lord's Vine-dressers have come to us
with

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with heavy Tidings of DOWNCUTTING. And many of them have gone out of the Vineyard, and left the World prophecying of sad Things, and we may fear that the sad time is hastning apace, when the Lord will come to do the Work, whereof they have so long time been bringing the Word; forasmuch as our Barrenness increaseth.

Fourthly, We pass unto the Fourth Thing in this Fifth part of this Parable. *Viz. The Reason why he would bear no longer with this Fig-tree, but have it down, and out of the Vineyard. It cumbereth the Ground, [Cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?]*

Why *ivari quorsum, ad quid*. Wherefore? For what Cause? To what Purpose? As tho' he should have said, There's no reason why it should stand thus any longer, taking up Room, and yielding no Profit.

[It cumbereth the Ground.] The Word *Kataργει* signifies to make a thing void, idle, useless, fruitless, uneffectual and empty. So this Tree did CUMBER; i. e. make that part of the Ground where it stood, unprofitable and uneffectual; which being planted with profitable Trees, would have been useful.

In the Words we have something, *Im-*

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1. Implied and supposed; viz. That this Fig-tree did no Good in the Vineyard, it was of no use there.

2. Expressed and asserted; viz. That this Fig-tree did Hurt in the Vineyard; it was not only unprofitable, but it was hurtful; it cumbred the Ground.

First, Observe, That barren and unprofitable Persons in the Church take up room to no purpose. They are there among others, but they are there for no Good. 1. They do no Good in their room. 2. Have no Good by it.

1. That much room is taken up in the Church by those that are useless; if unprofitable Persons are useless, then I say there are many useless Persons in these Days; for there are Multitudes of unprofitable Persons. Alas! Sirs, in many Church Assemblies one may behold a very great and goodly shew of People: People throng together in huge numbers like Trees in a Vineyard; but if then one go among them, and walk through them, what are they generally? Why, alas, Trees that bear not, but only serve to make a number, and take up room.

2. How sad it is to be barren Trees in the Vineyard; such are useless there. And is it not sad, to stand there as others stand, that bring Fruit unto everlasting Life. and yet to have no Good, be no better for being there? Surely this is sad. 3. What

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3. What little reckoning the Lord makes of barren empty Persons in the Church. What Account, Sirs, do Men make of dry Trees in their Vineyards? Are they not slighted as Trees that do no Good, that bring no Fruit? Why, as Men make little Account of such Trees, so the Lord makes not much of barren, empty and unprofitable Persons in his Church. Thou mayest make much of thy self, and others may set thee up upon the Account of outward Excellencies or Advantages; but if thou be a dry Tree, God makes but little matter of thee.

Secondly, Observe, *That barren and unfruitful Persons in the Church do much hurt; they cumber the Church.*

Great and succulent Trees in a Vineyard, that are fruitless, not only do no Good, but they do much Hurt, by their,

1. Shadow, hindring the warm Beams, and more vigorous Influences of the Sun from the Fruit-bearing Trees.

2. Such drawing all the Moisture and Strength of the Earth unto them, and so making others near them to pine and languish for lack of due Nutriment. And as barren Trees do much hurt in the Vineyard, so barren Persons do much Hurt in the Church; they are a Cumber to it many ways. As they,

1. Hinder others from Good in their places, that are planted nigh them, by the shadow of their Examples.

2. Hinder that Good that would be done by others in their places, if they were out of them, and others in them. Thus if *Tyre* and *Zidon* had been in the room of *Chorazin* and *Bethsaida*, they Matth. 11. 21. would have brought forth Fruits meet for Repentance. If Turks and Pagans had been in the places of many in the Church of God, they would have done better in them, than they do in that Station.

1. See from hence what thou art, if thou beest a barren and unprofitable Person. Thou art a Cumber, a Trouble, a Burden. 1. The Nation thou art of is cumbred with thee; and if there were no more, thou art alone enough to destroy much Good, *Eccl. 9. 18.* it's said one Sinner destroyeth much Good. 2. The Town thou livest in is cumbred with thee; thou art hindering and hurting all about thee. And, 3. The Congregation thou belongest unto is cumbred with thee; there thou art a Troubler. 4. The Family thou art in is cumbred with thee, thou art an ill Example there. Now is not this a sad, a very sad Case to be a CUMBER every-where. O think of it!

2. See hence, that the Lord's Vineyard is very sadly cumbred in these Days. For there are many of these barren Trees that take up

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up room in it: Nay, in very many Quarters of it there are hardly any other kind of Trees, any but empty Trees, and of these there is no want.

Thirdly, Observe, *That there is very just cause why barren and unfruitful Persons should be cut down out of the Lord's Vineyard: They do no Good, they do much hurt in it, and what should they stand for?*

1. See the Goodness of God in sparing and passing by unfruitful Persons. What Goodness is this, that he spares many a Sinner, Year after Year, in the Church, and in the World, who does no Good in either, but much Hurt in both? As if a Man should spare an unprofitable Briar or Thorn in the midst of his Vineyard. If thou be an unfruitful Person, thou art a standing Monument of sparing Mercy.

2. The Justice of God in cutting down barren Persons out of his Vineyard. This clears the Lord as righteous, and as holy in all his Proceedings towards them. Can any Body think amiss of it, when a Man cuts down a useless, a noxious Bramble out of his Vineyard?

Fourthly, Observe, *That the Church of God has no loss when barren Persons are removed out of it. What Loss is it to a Vineyard to have empty Trees cut down,*

and hurried out of it? It's no worse, has no Detriment by this; why, no more Loss is it for God to cut down, and remove barren and unfruitful Persons out of his Church.

1. See that there are many People within the Church that may well be spared, and of whom there would be no miss if they were taken away; they are but in the WAY. If thou beest an empty Tree, why, the Church of God, the Congregation thou art of should lose nothing thereby if thou wert in thy Grave; thou only takest up room. Nay, as oft as such go, the Church is eased of a Cumber-tree; of one that did no Good, but much Harm in it.

2. How worthless empty Persons are. We have a saying of Persons worn with Grief, that they are not worth the Ground they go on. We may truly say of barren and unfruitful Persons in the Church of God, they are not worth the Ground they grow in: It would be no Loss to have them ridded up by the Roots, and quite removed out of the Vineyard. For observe,

1. They do no Good, are no way useful either by their, 1. Prayers; or, 2. Confession; or, 3. Example.

2. Have no Good, how long soever they stand there, they are still the same. As Ignorant, as Carnal, as Insensible of Spiritual Things, as Corrupt, as Impenitent as at first. O, many have no Good, by standing in the Vineyard Twenty, Forty, or Sixty Years!

G

2dly,

2dly, *Observe*, One barren and bad Tree, may spoil all that are about it; so one ill Person may infect many. How did one *Korah*, one *Jeroboam*, one *Ahab*, undo many one after another in their Days.

They hinder that Good that would be done by others. How many great Men are there in the World who are like unto *Nebuchadnezzar's* Tree in the midst of the Earth, which he saw in his Dream, whose height was great, reaching up to Heaven, and the Sight thereof to the end of the Earth, *Dan.* 4. 10, 11, 12. They take up a great deal of room, but do no Good therein, from one end of the Year to another; whereas, if good Men were in their rooms, what Good might they, nay, what Good would they do, by the Influence of their Authority and Examples. *Athan.* mentions Plants of Paradise, that impart an Aromatical Savour to the Trees about them. Such would many great ones be in their places, if they were but half as good as great.

They that are useless in the World are a burden to the World. The Earth groans under them, and the Pit gapes for them.

3dly, *Observe*, There is no Loss when they are cut down and removed out of the Church. They are of no more use in the Church than a blind Eye, a deaf Ear,

a withered Hand, or a lame Foot in the Body. They may well be spared; and when gone, there will be a miss of them in their places, but no loss, or want of their Presence.

4thly, *Observe*, How worthless, barren and unprofitable Persons are in the Church; the Holy Ghost in the Scripture resembles them to the most worthless, useless and noxious Plants. As to,

1. Thorns and Briars, *Isa.* 10. 17. *Micah* 7. 4. *Cant.* 2. 2.

2. Oaks, whose Leaf fadeth, *Isa.* 1. 30. as a withered Oak.

3. Trees, whose Fruit withereth, *Jude* 12.

4. Empty Vines, *Hosea* 1. 10.

5. Vine of Sodom, and Fields of Gomorrah, *Deut.* 32. 32.

6. Tares that choak the good Seed, *Mat.* 13. 38.

7. Grass on the House top, which withereth afore it groweth up, *Psal.* 129. 6.

Thus they are resembled (as here to a fruitless Fig-tree) to the most unprofitable useless Plants.

Sixthly, We come now to the Sixth and Last Thing in this Parable; viz. The Prorogation of the Sentence passed upon this barren Fig-tree.

We have seen, 1. What the Sentence is: Namely, [CUT IT DOWN], v. 7.

G 2

2. To

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2. To whom he gave it in charge to see this Sentence executed upon this barren Fig-tree, and that was the Dresser. 3. Why he would bear no longer with this Fig-tree, but have it down, and out of the Vineyard; *viz.* because it cumbered the Ground. [Cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground ?]

And here in this 8th and 9th Verses we have the Prorogation of the Punishment, or Delay of the Execution of this Sentence. The heavy *Doom* after so long Patience passed on this Fig-tree. *Ad tempus remoratur.* And as it was not hastily passed against it, so now, when passed, it's not suddenly executed on it.

Now in this we may take notice of these three things.

1. How, and by whom this Stay and Delay of Execution was obtained? Namely, by the Intercession of the Vine-dresser, *v.* 8. *And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this Year also.*

2. How long it was delayed, or for what term and space of time? *Ans.* The Vine-dresser here sues but for one Year. [*Let it alone this Year also.*]

3. By what Arguments the Vine-dresser moves for this Forbearance of this Fig-tree, *this Year also*, and they are two.

1. *Ex sua parte*: Till I shall dig about it, and dung it.

2. *Ex*

The Barren Fig-Tree.

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2. *Ex parte Arboris*: If it bear Fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

We begin with the First, wherein we are shewed, *By whom the Stay and Delay of the Execution of the Sentence upon this Fig-tree was obtained?* And that was the Dresser of the Vineyard.

I.

1. Observe, *That faithful Ministers are very tender of the Souls, and Earnest for the Good of those under their Charge, and would not have them perish in their Sins.* The Vine-dresser here steps in between the Ax and the barren Tree, and begs hard that it may not go down in this State.

The Infidelity and Stubbornness of the Jews lay heavy on the Heart of Paul, Rom. 9. 1, 2, 3. *I say the Truth in Christ, I lie not, my Conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great Heaviness, and continual Sorrow in my Heart. For I could wish that my self were accursed from Christ, for my Brethren, my Kinsmen, according to the Flesh.* He was in travel for the Galatians, Chap. 4. 19. He could not speak or write of the self-destroying People at Philippi without Tears, Phil. 3. 18, 19. O, Sirs, serious and faithful Overseers would fain see People do well, are sore troubled to see them doing ill;

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ill; or continuing so, as that they know it cannot go well with them.

1. How unfit they are to be KEEPERS, or DRESSERS of the Vineyard, who have no Care of the Trees, (that is to say, of such Souls) that are planted in it.

2. What it is that would be the great Incouragement to Ministers, in carrying on their Work; namely, the Fruitfulness of the People under their Ministry.

2dly, Observe, *That unprofitable People may be spared for a time, for the Sake, and upon the Intercession of their Ministers.* The Intercession of the Dresser prevailed for this Fig-tree another Year. So Moses stood between the Israelites and DOWN-CUTTING in the Wilderness, Psal. 106. 23. How stood? By earnest Intercession for them, Exod. 32. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. *The Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this People, and behold it's a stiff-necked People — let me alone—that I may consume 'em—And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy Wrath wax hot against this People? &c.—And 'tis said, upon this Intercession, the Lord repented of the Evil which he thought to do unto them.* So we find them spared again and again upon the Intreaty of the Prophet Amos, Chap. 7. V. 1. You have the Judgment set down by the Prophet; namely, the Formation of Grasshoppers in

in the beginning of the latter Growth, which devoured the Grass of the Land.

V. 2. You have the Prophet's Mediation to avert this Judgment. *Then I said, O Lord, forgive, I beseech thee, by whom shall Jacob arise? For he is small.*

V. 3. You have the Removal of it upon the Prophet's Intercession. *The Lord repented for this. It shall not be, saith the Lord.* So likewise v. 4, 5, 6.

1. What a Mercy it is to a People to have praying Vine-dressers: These may be Instruments to obtain Reprieves for them, and stand in the gap when Judgments are coming upon them. O! we know not what an unknown Shelter and Protection on, of these may be to a Place and People.

2. How sad it is with a People, when a praying Minister is removed from them; when a People lose these, they lose their Intercessors: Those that were ready to interpose, and most like to prevail for them, for the preventing or removing of Judgments coming upon them.

3. That faithful Vine-dressers have much Power with God, or the Prayers and Intercessions of the Lord's Messengers have a special Efficacy. As one well observes: Tho' God hath much Respect to the Petitions of his weak Servants, and tho' some private Persons may excel a holy Minister in Prayer, yet God hath more Regard to

the Intreaties of his faithful Ministers, who have special *Charge* and *Commission* to be his Remembrancers for the Good of that People which he committeth to their Charge: And their Petitions are of more Avail and Power with God, both to procure his Blessings, and avert his Judgments. This the Lord plainly intimates to us in many places. As this is intimated in *Gen. 20. 7.* *Now therefore restore the Man his Wife; for he is a Prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live. [He is a Prophet]* and so a Man of much Power to prevail with me. This is also intimated in *Jer. 27. 18.* *If they be Prophets, and if the Word of the Lord be with them, let them now make Intercession to the Lord of Hosts* — Intimating, that those who are so indeed, have much Power. And so *Psal. 99. 6.* *Moses and Aaron among the Priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his Name; they called upon the Lord, and he answered them.* But why is this Commemoration of them? Does he not hear all his Church? Yea, *For the Lord beareth the Poor, and despiseth not his Prisoners* — *The Eyes of the Lord are upon the Righteous, and his Ears are open unto their Cry.* But (as one well observes) these his Holy Priests and Prophets had the Ear of God (as special Favourites have their Princes Ears) and could be Heard and Answered, when others

Psal. 69.
33.

Psal. 34.
15.

others were denied Access and Audience. Hence also the Apostle *James* advises, *Is any sick among you? Let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him; and the Prayer of Faith shall save the Sick.* Acts done by vertue of Office are under more solemn Promises of Success. James 5. 14, 15.

4. That it's the Duty of faithful Ministers to be much with God for their barren People. The Vine-dresser was ready to step in for this, that the barren Fig-tree might be spared another Year. So we should be ready upon all Occasions, to intercede with God to spare the barren People that sit under our Ministry, with Hopes of Fruitfulness in them.

5. People may from hence see what Welcome the Lord's Servants should have with them. If they have Power with God for us, then it's very meet and fit they should have Power for God with us. I say, if their Prayers be so available in Heaven with God for us, then it's very equal that their Messages from God in Heaven to us should have much Place with us. Let us think of it when they speak to God for us. Why,

1. It's to an infinite Majesty.
2. It's for poor Worms.
3. It's for guilty and provoking Creatures. Yet when they speak from God to us: Why,

1. It's

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1. It's from an Infinite Majesty.
2. It's to poor Worms.
3. It's for our own Good.

Now is it not meet and fit they should have Power for God with us, that their Message may have place with us.

3dly, Observe, *That a People may be spared for a time; not because they are more fruitful than others about them, but because they have praying Vine-dressers.* This Fig-tree was spared, spared another Year: But it was not for its own sake, for any thing in it self. It was empty and useles, and deserved CUTTING DOWN. It was upon the Intercession of the Vine-dresser. So I say, we may not presently conclude, that those are worst who go down first: Or if we be spared when others go down, that therefore we are better, or that God is better pleased with us than he is with them. No, no, it may be something else that at present keeps off the Stroke. The *Galileans*, whose Blood *Pilate* mingled with their Sacrifices, were not greater Sinners than other *Galileans*; *but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,* (v. 2, 3. of this Chapter.)

Secondly, We pass now unto the Second Thing mentioned in this Sixth and Last Part of the Parable; viz. The Term of Time that was begged for that barren Fig-

Fig.

Fig-tree; *Another Year*. [Let it alone this Year also.] Only one Year is begged for a trial, and this Tree is suffered to stand so much longer, to see if Matters would mend with it.

1. Observe, *That the Lord is very exorable and easie to be intreated*. Here he condescended to the Intreaty of the Dresser of the Vineyard, and spared this Fig-tree upon his Intercession. So,

1. He would have spared *Sodom* upon *Abraham's* Intercession, if there could have been but Fifty Righteous Persons found in it. He condescended to him, when he interceded to spare the Place, if there were but 50 Righteous Persons to be found in it, *Gen. 18. 24, 26.* and then to 45, *v. 28.* and then to 40, *v. 29.* and 30, *v. 30.* And last of all, would have spared it if but 10 Righteous Persons had been found in it, *v. 32.*

2. He spared *Niniveh* upon their Repentance, *Jonah 3. 10.*

3. He spared *Pharaoh* upon the Intercession of *Moses*, *Exod. 8. 8.* compared with the 13th.

4. *Ahab* upon his Humiliation, *1 Kings 21. 28, 29.*

5. He spared *Israel* upon *David's* Intercession, *2 Sam. 24. 25.*

6. He

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6. He was intreated of *Manasseh* upon his Supplication, and brought him again to *Jerusalem* into his Kingdom, 2 *Chron.* 33. 13.

All these Instances we have of his Willingness to be intreated, and of sparing People and Persons upon the Intercession of his Servants, and their own Repentance.

1. See that he is propense to shew Mercy. This *Facilitas Dei*, easiness to be intreated, speaks his Propensity to Mercy, If this were not a Work, that he's forward to, he would not so easily yield unto it.

2. This may invite Sinners to Repentance, the Lord himself proposes it, as an Inducement to Repentance, *Jer.* 3. 12. *Go and proclaim these Words — I am merciful saith the Lord — I am easie to be moved to Mercy; and if you'll but now turn, notwithstanding all that you have done against me, you shall find me exorable.* So Sirs,

3. This may encourage Penitents to go to him for Mercy, 1 *Kin.* 20. 31. *His Servants said unto him, we have heard that the Kings of the House of Israel are merciful Kings; let us, I pray thee, put Sackcloth on our Loins, and Ropes upon our Heads, and go out to the King of Israel, peradventure he will save thy Life.* Why, as they took Encouragement from the Report of Mercy in the Kings of *Israel*, to make Supplication for their Master's Life, with an Emblem

blem of shewing, that they deserved not their own; so thou may'st much more encourage thy self, in applying thy self to him for Mercy, because he will be very *gracious unto thee at the Voice of thy Cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.* Penitent Ephraim no sooner fell a Mourning, but he says, *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself — And I will surely have Mercy upon him, saith the Lord* — So when Israel takes Words, and turn to the Lord, and saith unto him, Take away all Iniquity, and receive us graciously, Hos. 14. 2, 3. he (v. 4.) declares, *I will heal their Backslidings, I will love them freely.* And as soon as the Prodigal resolves within himself to return to his Father, and to acknowledge that he had sinn'd against him, and was unworthy to be call'd his Son, even while he was a great way off, just as it were begun his Journey, his Father saw him, and had Compassion, and ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him, Luke 15. 18, 19, 20.

4. This may encourage the Servants of the Lord to intercede hard for others. As,
1. For Persons. 2. For Families. 3. For Towns. 4. For Congregations and Nations that are barren; as the Dresser here did with the Lord of the Vineyard, to spare the barren Fig-tree: You have a God to go unto, that is very exorable, and you know not how much your Intercession may

may prevail: A few, yea, sometimes one Person, has been an Instrument to preserve and keep Ruin off from many. One Drefser here. One *Moses* kept Ruin off from the whole Congregation of *Israel*, *Exod.* 32. 11, 14. One Man, *Jer.* 5. 1. One Man would have done it, could he have been found, *Ezek.* 22. 30. A very small Remnant preserved from Ruin, *Isa.* 1. 9.

5. This may encourage the Servants of the Lord to go to him in their straits. If he be so yielding to them when they come for others, then what will he say *them* Nay of (that may be good) for themselves? Surely nothing.

6. This may teach us to imitate the Lord in this. O therefore, be not inexorable nor inflexible toward those that have injur'd you, or deserv'd ill at your Hands; but be ready to condescend unto Intreaties, and upon Hopes of Reformation. The Apostle *James* tells us, That the *Wisdom* that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easie to be entreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits. But to be implacable is a Mark of one given up to a reprobate Mind; *Rom.* 1. 28, 31.

7. This may teach us to beware of abusing this Facility of God, in making it an Encouragement to Security and Impenitency in Sin. Say not, If the Lord be thus gracious and easie to be entreated, then I may continue in my evil Courses a little longer.

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III

longer. For know, Soul, time will come when he will be inexorable, and no Intercession will take place. There is a time when he will not hear, *nor be found of thee, altho' thou dost call upon him*, Prov. 1. 28. *Therefore seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near*, Isa. 55. 6.

2dly, Observe, That it's a great Mercy to a Person or People, that are ready for **CUTTING DOWN**, to have a time indulged them to repent and reform in. This Year is begg'd as a Favour for this Fig-tree: So Apoc. 2. 21. *I gave her space to repent of her Fornication*. The Lord mentions it as a Favour to Jezebel, that he gave her Space to repent. It's from great condescending Goodness in God, and for them it is granted unto; that is to say, to Persons ready for *Down-cutting*. It's a great Favour for a Person or People that are ready for **CUTTING DOWN**, to have a time indulged them to repent and reform in. For,

1. Hereby they are kept all that while out of the Fire. Had this Tree gone down when the Charge was given, it should have been flaming in the Fire this Fourth Year, while it was yet standing in the Vineyard, with an Expectation of Fruitfulness. And sure enough, Sirs, a Room in the Vineyard is before a Room in Hell.

2. What

The Barren Fig-Tree.

2. While they are standing, there may be Hope of scaping, and that they shall never come to DOWN-CUTTING. The Apostle tells us, (2 Pet. 3. 15.) God's long-suffering is Man's Salvation. This has been a making unto many a Sinner ready for Ruin. It was a making unto *Manasseh* King of *Judah*: Had the Lord cut him down when he was filling the Streets of *Jerusalem* with Blood from one end to the other, what would have become of him? Acts 9. 4. This was a making to *Saul*: Had the Lord cut him down when he fell to the Earth, as he was breathing out Threatnings against the Disciples, what an end would it have been? And so this has been a making to Thousands in the World, as *Austin* said of himself after a Feaver, whereby he was brought nigh unto Death, while in his unconverted State; *Quo irem, si tunc hinc abirem, nisi in ignem atq; tormenta digna factis meis?* (Conf. 100.) Whither should I have gone, if then I had died, but into Fire and Torments, the just Desert of my evil Deeds? So may I say of many, if God had cut them down by Death; whither should they have gone but into Eternal Torments?

3. DOWN-CUTTING cuts off all Hope for ever. So long as the Tree is up, and in its place, there may be some hopes. I, but when it is once down, then there is no room for any Hope. Many a Malefactor,

factor, when Sentence has been pass'd, has, by the Benefit of a Reprieve for a few Days, obtain'd a Pardon, and never once come to Execution. But when there is no Reprieve, but present leading unto Execution; why, when Execution is once done, there's no Hope. So here, so long as we are spared, and stand in the Vineyard, there is Hope. Oh! it's a Mercy to be spared! For **DOWN-CUTTING** will cut off from us all Hope for ever.

1. What Mercy many poor Sinners have shewn them. O, Sirs, many of us have had a fourth Year, *i. e.* many a long Day, and fair Opportunity given us, since the time that we were in the Case of this Tree. That is to say, worthy enough of, and ready enough for **CUTTING-DOWN**.

2. Learn to take notice of the Mercy that you have had in this. It's a great Mercy, and it's a Mercy that we are all great Sharers in.

1. Are we converted? Time was when the Lord indulged us a time to repent, and be converted in.

2. Are we unconverted? God is long-suffering towards us, it's he that procrastinates the Sentence of **DOWN-CUTTING**, else we should not be another Hour out of Hell.

3. Use it as a Season that is indulged to you out of Infinite Goodness.

H

3dly,

3dly, Observe, That when Persons are begged off, who are ready for DOW NCUTTING, it's but for a time. The Dresser does not once move, that this Tree (tho' of a goodly Stature, and great Shadow) might still stand, and never be shifted from its Place: All he begs is, but that it might keep its room this Year. Sirs, if we be unprofitable Trees, we may possibly be begg'd off, and kept from the Ax for a time, a little time, but that's all, it will not be for ever: There will be no Intercessor to move once for this afterwards, but down it must go, if it be unfruitful this Fourth Year also.

4thly, Observe, That oftentimes the making or undoing of a Person or a People depends on a little space of Time; or the standing or falling of a Person or People lyes on a little Time. Pray take notice of it; it rises plainly from hence. The standing or falling of this TREE (typing this great People, who had continued so long) stood now on this one Year. And it was then to stand or fall according to the Improvement made of this Year. All lay now on this little bit of time; their standing or falling; their making or undoing for ever: And so I say the making or undoing of a Person or People depends on a little space of time.

Alexander

Alexander set up a Torch in the Church of God for a time, but its Lustre was quickly extinct: So the Lord gives Men and Women a time of *Grace* and *Mercy*, wherein they may do well, and their making or undoing lyes on the hitting or missing of this time. My beloved, pray think of it. There are (as Divines observe) certain secret Times and Seasons set for a People, and for the Conversion of Souls; which when they are once past and gone, their Condition is desperate; it's but this Year also, and then there is no more Remedy. This is not obscurely, but plainly imported in these Scriptures, viz. *Gen. 6. 3.* My Spirit (says God) shall not always strive with Man. *Prov. 1. 28.* Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer. *Esay 55. 6.* Seek the Lord while he may be found. *Ezek. 24. 13.* I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged; thou shalt not be purged from thy Filthiness any more. *Hosea 4. 17.* Ephraim is joined to Idols, let him alone—*Luke 19. 42.* If thou hadst known in this thy Day the things which belong unto thy Peace, but now they are hid from thine Eyes. *Heb. 3. 13.* Exhort one another daily, while it is called to day: lest any of you be hardened thro' the Deceitfulness of Sin. All these plainly hint that there is a set time for a People, and for the Conversion of Souls to Jesus Christ. If it be said, But what

time is this, that Mens making or undoing stands thus on? Why, I say, it's this Year; *i. e.* This set, this allotted time; and how long it is with every one, none can say: The time that thy making or undoing, and that my eternal Salvation stands on, is a time that God reserves to himself, and that none knows (how long, or how short) but himself. Only we may say, that the time that the standing or falling of Souls for ever stands on, is,

1. No longer than Life, with any of the Children of Men; thy standing or falling, Soul, stands on a little time; *i. e.* the time of this Life at longest; that's the longest Day that any have, *Eccles. 11. 3.* — *Where the Tree falleth, there it shall be,* says Solomon; where he sets out the Condition of Man after Death, by the Similitude of a Tree, after it is cut down. If it fall toward the *South*, or toward the *North*, there it lyes. As *Salmeron*; the,

- | | | | |
|------------|--------------|---|---------|
| 1. Tree | } represents | { | Man. |
| 2. Felling | | | Death. |
| 3. South | | | Heaven. |
| 4. North | | | Hell. |

And 5. The lying of the Tree, (whether it fall toward the *South* or *North*) in the Place where it falls, shadows out the Immutability of Man's Condition after Death. In Death the TREE (MAN) falls either toward the *South* or *North*; *i. e.* either Heaven or Hell. And whither way soever it be,

in the place where the Tree falleth, there it shall be. If toward the *South*, there it shall be; if toward the *North*, there it shall be; there is no shifting of its place after it's once fallen. Thus, Sirs, as it is with the Tree, so with us; [as the Tree falls, so it lyes] as Death leaves us, Judgment will find us, and Eternity will find us. *For there is no Work, nor Devise, nor Knowledge, nor Wisdom in the Grave whither we are going, Eccl. 9. 10.*

2. Not so long as Life, with many of the Children of Men. It's no longer than the time of this short Life at longest. I, but it's not so long with many; the Day of Grace is done, and over, and past with them afore their Days are done. This we may see plainly from the forementioned places, *Prov. 1. 28. and Isa. 55. 6. They shall call upon me, but I will not answer: They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me—Therefore seek the Lord while he may be found—*The time of finding may be past while there is a time of seeking. This was the Case of the *Jews* in *Esay's* time, *Esay 6. 9, 10. And he said, Go and tell this People, hear ye indeed, but understand not; see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the Heart of this People fat, and make their Ears heavy, and shut their Eyes, lest they see with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and understand with their Heart, and convert, and be*

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healed. His Ministry served but for the further hardning and blinding of them. In *Jeremiah's* time, *Fer. 6. 30. Reprobate Silver* (says God) *shall Men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.* This was *Ferusalem's* Case in our Saviour's time; *Luke 19. 42. If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy Day, the things which belong unto thy Peace! but now they are hid from thine Eyes.* *Ferusalem* stood Forty Years after this, but her Day was now done. O, Sirs, many Sinners stand many a Day, and many a Year in the Vineyard, after that Christ has laid the Curse on them, that he laid on the Fig-tree, that Fruit shall not grow on them henceforward for ever, *Mat. 21. 19.* Thus, Soul, think of it; the time that thy making or undoing depends on may be quite over many a Day afore thy time be over in this Life; God's time, and Man's time; the Day of Grace, and the Day of Life, are not always of the same Date and Duration: *Ferusalem* out-lived her Day of Grace, and Time of Peace, and so mayest thou.

3. The time of their making or undoing is very short with some of the Children of Men. As there is a set time, so some have a short time, only One Year; One Year, One Week, One Day, One Hour, as the standing or falling of some stands on.

1. One Offer only. God makes short Work with them; they have a fair Opportunity and Offer put into their Hands once, and on this all stands. Now they may do well; but if they miss this nick of time, he has done with them. This was the Case of the Guests, *Luke 14. 24.* They were but once invited, and for their first Refusal this Curse is laid on them; *viz. [They shall not taste of my Supper.]* It is not said, they shall never come where the Supper stands on the Board, but they shall never TASTE. Many sit under the Ordinances, where Christ in Gospel Dishes is set forth admirably, but through the Efficacy of this Curse upon them, never TASTE of those Dainties all their Life. *Gurn. 2. 553.* Thus the Lord makes a very short Work with some; takes them at the first Word, leaves them upon the first Repulse.

2. On few Offers. If he take them not at first Denial, yet at second or third, when they have been but awhile under Means. He took *Saul* at the beginning of his Kingdom; he took the *Jews* at the beginning of *Jeremiah's* Preaching, *Jer. 7. 16.* *Pray not for this People — for I will not hear thee.* *Acts 10. 16.* *This was done thrice, and the Vessel was received up again into Heaven.* Thus you see it's but a short Time, a few Offers, that the making or undoing of many Persons depends upon.

4. This time is running out apace. If we suppose that some have a long time, yet this time is running on, and wearing out from Day to Day, and it will come at length to One Year. This Tree had had a long time, Three Years, but now it was but One Year that all lay upon. So I say, if thou hast had, or may yet have many Years, yet time is running on; and it may come to this, that thy *making* or *undoing* will stand on One Year, One Week, One Day, One Hour. He that is now bearing may be saying of thee this Day, I will let this Tree alone only this One Year, this One Week, this One Day, this One Hour. Now,

Does the making or undoing of a Person or a People depend on a little short space of time, and that too running out apace? Then,

1. Think oft and seriously on this with thy self; Soul, say, My standing or falling stands on a little time; I know not how little, how short a shread of time all may be now lying on: It may now be but One Year more, or One Month more, on One Week more, on One Day more; nay, or but One Hour more, and I shall be *made* or *undone*, *saved* or *damned* for ever. I have had much time. Now it's but this Year also, and then all's done. These Thoughts would mightily quicken thy Diligence at last.

2. What

2. What Concernment our time is of, that we have in the World. O we little think what lyes on this, while we waste it either to no purpose, or to very ill purpose! But, Sirs, whatever we do with it, you see our *making* or *undoing*, our everlasting Conditions depend on the spending, the Work we shall do in the use we shall make of a bit of time. Is it not of Concernment what we do! My Beloved, suppose a Man by some great Miscarriage had forfeited his Estate and Life, and that upon Intercession of Friends, his Prince should cause an Hour-glass to be turned, and set him some Work to do; telling him, that as he spent that Hour, he should either be freed from suffering, and received to Favour, or delivered to Execution. Would it not be the great Concernment of this Man to use his utmost Diligence and Care, in spending this Hour to the Satisfaction of his Prince, and saving of his Life and Estate? Why, this is the Case of the poor unprofitable Sinner, he has forfeited all, his Life, Estate, eternal Happiness, and Well-being hereafter; all is forfeited to his great Prince, the Lord of Heaven and Earth: Yet God has turned the Glass, and given him this Year also to return in; he has one Year more given him to work out his Salvation in.

3. The

3. The great Danger and Hazard of Delays about Soul-Business. This is a very common thing among Men; nothing is so much over-looked, and neglected by many, as the Concernment of their Souls, and another World. And as nothing is more common, so nothing is more hazardous. O beware of it! Thousands are undone by it! All (we see) hangs on a little time, that is secret and unknown to us; and therefore it's Matter of extream Hazard to trifle in this Matter. We know not at what Day, in what Hour our last Sand may run down, and all our time, this Year also may end. Alas, many and many a one have reckoned of time enough; of many Years to come, who have not had a Month's nor a Week's time to turn them in.

4. Then it's but a while, and there will be a great Turn with every one of us. When this Year also was gone about, then there was a Turn in the Condition of this Tree; so, Sirs, there is but a little way between us and the time, when we must *Stand* for ever, or *Fall* for ever; go *Up* or *Down* for ever. O, Sirs, great, great things are near us! Making or undoing within a Year, or Month, or Week of us. Have you gone through many Changes, through great *Ups* and *Downs* of Conditions in the World? Why, all that is past is nothing to what is a coming, and hard by at this Day.

5. This

5. This may awaken secure ones, who lye secure in their barren and unprofitable States from Year to Year. Sirs, what think you of it? This tells you that you are almost at an end, almost at **DOWN-CUTTING**; that except you repent, and turn, you will shortly be rent up out of your places, and thrown into the Fire. I pray think [of it; how was *Belshazzar* Dan. 5.5,6. amazed and astonished, when he saw the Fingers of a Man's Hand writing his **DOOM** upon the Plaister of the Wall in his Palace-Chamber. O! this marr'd all his Mirth and Mufick; Lords and Ladies, Crowns and Kingdoms could not relieve him. Why, Sirs, this is your case, your very case this Day; your **MENE, MENE TEKEL UPHRASIN** is in **WRITING**; I say, this will shortly be done: And God will say to thee, 1. *Mene*,] God hath numbred thy Kingdom, and finished it; *i. e.* All thy Peace, and Comfort, and Happinefs, that ever thou shalt have, is numbred, and ready to be finished. 2. *Tekel*,] Thou art weighed in the Ballances, and art found wanting; *i. e.* to stand in Judgment; to meet the great God, wanting for Heaven and Happinefs. 3. *Peres*.] Thy Kingdom is divided — Thou shalt be quite excluded, and kept from it; and the poor Saints shall have the Room thou reckons of in the Kingdom.

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6. Let this quicken all (that look for Salvation) to take the present Opportunity without any more delay. If the making or undoing of Persons upon a short space of time, then a little delay may be your undoing. O therefore walk while you have the Light; work out your own Salvation; stand not empty in the Vineyard this Year also; it may be your last; your standing or falling may be standing on it. Now that you may take care, consider, that as your *making* or *undoing* depends upon a little thread of time; so if you let this time pass, when it's once gone and past,

1. Your Day of Grace will be over and gone; this will be at an end, and you will be in *Jerusalem's* Case. Now will not this be sad? Alas, then you may say, as Jer. 8. 20. those in *Jeremy*, *The Harvest is past, the Summer is ended, and we are not saved.* O, Sirs! if your Day of Grace be once done, you are for ever undone. For,

2. There will be no Remedy. This is another Consideration. Let this Year also, *i. e.* this nick of time allotted to you pass, and there's no farther Remedy for you. For my Beloved,

1. God will not stay, or tarry a Day longer for you, but have you down. I say, there will be no more Opportunities.

1. If

1. If then you cry, he will not hear, or be any more intreated. Now, if you will come, and seek him, he will be found of you. Now if you pray, he will hear you; now if you will turn, he will admit you into Favour: But then there is no Intteaty that can prevail. Thus God tells the *Israelites*, *Isa. 1. 15.* *When ye spread forth your Hands, I will hide mine Eyes from you; yea, when ye make many Prayers, I will not hear*——*Jer. 11. 11.* *Though they cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them.* So likewise, *Chap. 14. 12. Ezek. 8. 18.* and *Mich. 3. 4.* And thus it will be with us, if we stand empty till this Year also, this fixed time of our making or undoing, of our standing or falling, be past and gone.

2. If others cry for you, he will not hear: No Intercession of the Servants of God, who have most Interest in Heaven, can prevail any longer for you. When the *Jews* Day was done, the Lord would not let *Jeremiah* pray for them, *Chap. 7. 16. 11. 14. 14. 11.* And as *Jeremiah* was a Man of great Interest with God, and likely to prevail with, and succeed therein for a Blessing. So God either casts them out of the Prayers of his Servants the Prophets, or if they pray, their Prayers return into their own Bosoms, without any Advantage or Benefit to those they pray for.

Thus

Thus no Remedy. For if your selves or others on your behalf cry, he will not hear, nor any more be entreated.

3. You know not how soon all this may be, how soon your Day may be over, how soon no room for Intreaties may be left; but it will be in vain for you to pray, in vain for Dressers to pray and intercede, in vain for any Body to stir, or say another Word for you. Now therefore does it not concern you to take Care, and work out your own Salvation. It may quickly be too late, your time may soon be gone and past.

Sixthly, But may be some poor trembling and troubled Soul may say, Alas! this is it I have feared many a Day, and now I fear it more than ever; I fear, I fear it is too late, and that my Day, my Year is done, and over already. Now to this I would say;

1. That we cannot peremptorily or positively say of any particular Person, this Man, or this Woman, while in this Life, that their Day is over. There are sad Signs indeed, that minister great and just Grounds of Fear concerning divers Persons, but are not sufficient Bottoms for positive Conclusions that their Day is over. Yet,

2. Cer-

2. Certainly (tho' we cannot point out the single and individual Persons) this has been, and now is the very Case of many : And truly they have cause to fear it this Day, who have sate long dead, empty and unfruitful under the plain and powerful Dispensation of the Gospel. Truly I cannot look on them, but with a trembling Heart, who have had home, lively and working Ordinances for some considerable part of their time, but never been wrought on to any degree of a visible Change by them. But,

3. If thou beest afraid of this, and following after God in a serious use of Means, and God be dealing with thee in his Ordinances, and will not let thee alone. Why then, I say, it's a good Sign that thy Day is not over; for when the Day is over with Men, God lets them alone, and they let him alone, and they go on insensibly under this Judgment. As, *Isa. 29. 10.* it's said, *The Lord hath poured out — the Spirit of deep Sleep upon them, and hath closed their Eyes :* So that those whose Day is gone, and are under this Judgment, do not once see or suspect how it's with them.

5thly, Observe, That the Lord often makes a very quick Work with those that stand empty and unfruitful under the powerful Dispensation of the Gospel. This Tree was

was to be let alone, but it was but for One Year only after it was brought under the Eye and Care of a Digging and Dunging Vine-dresser. Now, I say, it was to have but One Year's Time, and One Year's Cost bestowed on it; and if that will not do, no more Time, no further Cost, but down it goes. So, I say, we may observe from hence, that the Lord many times makes quick Work with empty barren Persons under the powerful Dispensation of Gospel Priviledges. O, Sirs, when the Gospel comes in Power to a People, and Ordinances are quick and lively among them; why then usually the Lord is also quick and speedy with Souls; makes a quick Dispatch of the Treaty with them, and has soon done the one way or the other. Our Saviour says of *John*, *That he was a burning and a shining Light*. And we find in his time, that when he came preaching, and began to preach the Gospel, the Ax was laid unto the Root of the Trees, [*Now also (says Christ) the Ax is laid unto the Root of the Trees*] the Baptist was then but entring upon the Ministry among them, and yet the Ax was already at the Root of the Trees, and God was hewing them. O, Sirs! the Ax goes along with the preaching of the Gospel, and *that no sooner comes to a People, but this is at the Root of empty Trees*. The Lord makes quick Work: So when our Saviour sent out the

John 9.
35.

Mat. 3. 10.

the Twelve to Preach. You may see the Charge he sent them with, *Mat. 10. 14.* *And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your Words: when ye depart out of that City, shake off the Dust of your Feet.* And what then? *v. 15.* *Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the Land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judg-
ment, than for that City.* Mark, I pray, here was short Work, and a quick Dis- patch: As though he should say, Bring them the Tidings of the Kingdom, offer the Gospel, and Mercy of it to 'em; but if any of them refuse and reject it, or be not at leisure to hearken and give enter- tainment to it, stand not threaping it on 'em; let them alone, and go your way, sha- king the Dust off your Feet as a Testimony against them. Why, this is his way off with Souls, under the clear Light and Power of the Gospel. He will not wait so long on such, as he waits on others in darker Places; as we may see in the Chil- dren of *Israel*. Those that had seen his great Wonders in *Egypt*, and at the Red Sea, and were rebellious, he soon sware against many of them, that they should never enter into his Rest. But those that were born in the Wilderness, were born with many Years. He will sometimes wait many a Year on them that were cast in dark and obscure Corners; when he takes them shortly, that live in Times and Places

of much Light. But thus much for this Observation, that the Lord often makes quick Work with those that stand empty and unfruitful under the powerful Dispensation of the Gospel.

1. This speaks a sad and heavy Word to them who have stood long empty and unprofitable under powerful Gospel Dispensations. Does the Lord makes quick Work with others that stand empty under such Dispensations? Then these may fear that God's Treaty with them is ended; that God has done with them as to any saving Work. And tho' he suffer them to stand in their Rooms, yet it's not for any Good, but that they may dry and wither away on the Ground, and so (as dry Trees) be readier for the Fire. O, that this might be laid to Heart! There are many Thousands (however it may be at present) that have once in their Days, sate Ten or Twenty Years together, under *awakening Means*, but have never been awakened; under *quickning Means*, but are still spiritually dead; under *converting Means*, but are still impenitent: All have left them as *Blind*, as *Carnal*, as *Formal*, as *Empty*, as *Loose*, and as *Unfruitful* as they found them. Now I say, this speaks a Word of Trembling unto *such*: And O! that it might awaken them, to look about them, if so be there may yet be Hope concerning their Eternal Salvation. And,

2. This

2. This speaks a *warning Word* unto those who are, or may be brought under working Dispensations of the Gospel, viz. To know their Duty, and hit their Time. O trifle not, the Day of Grace, that is very full over a Soul, is often but short to that Soul; be you quick then in your Improvement, else the Lord may be quick with you, in giving you over. As in that fore-mentioned place, *Acts 10. 16. This was done thrice, and the Vessel was received up again into Heaven.* So there may be a threefold Offer of Grace to you; and yet if not diligent, you may miss of it, it may be quickly over and gone. Sirs, remember this Truth, and let it quicken you to all Care and Diligence, in improving a time of Gracious Visitation; because a short Work will the Lord make, when he sets to work with empty and unprofitable Persons *Rom. 9. 28.* under a powerful Gospel Dispensation.

3. That where the Gospel is a Foot and Working, their Work is going fast on, and Souls under it are ripening apace for *Rising or Falling, for Life or Death.* Trees that grow in this warm Sun, have a Mark soon set upon 'em, for *Good or Evil.*

4. What cause they have to be thankful, who have had a Work of the Gospel Grace upon them betimes, and as it were its first coming to them. If the Lord wrought a good Work in thee, then ever bless his Name, that thou wast

not left to go on in Blindness and Impenitency, till God would have treated no farther with thee.

Thirdly, We come now unto the Third and Last Thing in this Sixth and Last Part of this Parable, *viz.*

The Arguments that the Dresser makes use of to obtain this Forbearance of this Fig-tree this Year also: And they are Two.

First, The former you have, *v. 8.* [*Till I dig about it, and dung it.*] It's taken *Ex se*. It will not be needful curiously to inquire what is here meant by these Terms of *Digging* and *Dunging*. The Thing which they import is in short this, *Quod se omne Remedium adhibiturum.* That he would make use of every Remedy. All Means to make it fruitful.

Only we may here take notice of the Affection and Care of a faithful Minister, which are here notably expressed in the Carriage of the Dresser. Who,

1. Rather lays the Fault on himself, than on the Tree, as if he had not done his part: [*Till I dig about it, and dung it.*]

2. Promises to spare no Pains or Cost for the future, that it may become fruitful and profitable; I will dig, and I will dung it *Precando, Docendo, Monendo, Increpando*

1. Ob-

1. Observe, That Faithful Ministers have a very tender Affection towards the Souls of impenitent and unprofitable Persons, and would not have them cut down, and perish in that State. *Jeremy* tells the Rebellious Jews, That his Soul should—weep *Jer. 13. 17.* in secret Places for their Pride. *Paul's* Acts 17. Spirit was stirred in him, when he saw ^{16.} the Athenians wholly given up to Idolatry. And the Apostles knowing the Terror of ² Cor. 5. the Lord, they perswaded Men—It sets before us, ^{11.}

1. The Character of a good Minister. He's one that seeks them, not theirs; like the prophane Priests that seeks the Fleece, without regard to the Flock.

2. The Mistake of many People. If a Minister be impartial, plain, and home, deals roundly with them, and will not let them alone in their Sins, but dig about them; why, many call it Anger, and Railing, and impute it to Passion, and intemperate Heat, when indeed it comes from Love, Compassion, and Fear: Love and Compassion to their Souls, and Fear of their Eternal Undoing. They are your best Friends that deal plainliest with you, but your worst Enemies that flatter and sooth you most in your Sins.

2dly, Observe, That the Work of Ministers is painful Work. [Till I dig about

The Barren Fig-Tree.

about it, and dung it.] Two painful Parts of the Husbandman's Work. So they are resembled to, 1. Labourers in their Harvest. 2. Husbandmen in the Field. 3. Soldiers in the Camp. 4. Stewards in great Houses. 5. Fishers in the Sea. 6. Shepherds in the Pasture. 7. Stars, that are in continual Motion. 8. Candles, that while they shine, are wasting. 9. Clouds, that while they are watering the Earth, consume themselves. All which Titles speak their Work to be painful macerating Work. *Sacerdotium non est otium sed negotiorum negotium.* Bern.

1. That Ministers should not be idle: Idleness is Pernicious in Persons of any Calling, but most Pernicious in those that are in this Calling. Alas! while these play and trifle away their Time, Thousands of poor Souls that should be fed by them unto Salvation, are starved unto eternal Destruction.

2. That the Work of the Ministry is not a fine, soft, easie Work, as too many think. It's true indeed, it's a fine thing to have such and such Names, go in such and such Habits, have a great Income annexed thereto, and going therewith, and be Reverenced, and had in Admiration with Men. I say, these are fine things; but if Men will do the Work, if they will dig and dung, if they will apply themselves faithfully to cure the *Hardness, Blindness,*

ness, Infidelity, Security, Sensuality of those they come among, and make dry Trees begin to bud, his Labour is very great, and their Work will prove hard, ^{Hic Lab.} sweating Work. ^{hoc opus.}

3. See, that *Sunt qui pastorum nomine gaudent, pastorum autem officium implere Nolunt.* Aug. Some there are that love the Name of Pastors, who will not perform the Duty of Pastors.

3dly, Observe, That the end of Ministers Work is to make their People fruitful in Grace and Goodness. Till I dig about it, and dung it. And if it bear Fruit, well.] When the Dresser of the Vineyard employs himself about a Tree in the Vineyard, in digging and dunging it, he does it that this Tree may yeild him some Fruit, else he would never toil and sweat thus about it. So, Sirs, all the Pains, and all the Care that Ministers bestow, is for this, that People may be fruitful. For (says St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans) I would not have you ignorant, Brethren, ^{Rom. i. 13.} that I oftentimes purposed to come unto you — that I might have some Fruit among you. Mark, for what End it was that Paul desired to come unto them; namely, that he might have Fruit; i. e. that by his Ministerial Labours among them he might be an Instrument to promote the Conversion of Sinners, and the bringing forth

forth of Fruit in dry and barren Trees. This is the End and Design of Ministers Work; namely, to make their People fruitful. Now is this their End?

1. Then see what End we should have in coming to the Word, and frequenting of Holy Ordinances. If this be the end of Ministers in Preaching, then it should be the Design of our coming to the Word, we should come, that we may be made a fruitful People in Righteousness and Holiness. And truly, Sirs, if this be not our End in coming, and the Consequent of our coming, our coming will profit us nothing. Take heed then of coming meerly out of Custom, and for Company, as many do, or going on from Day to Day, without any Regard to the Work of the Ministry on their Hearts and Lives. O, bare coming to the Church, though you come every Day, will never bring you a Step nearer Heaven.

2. That unprofitable People frustrate to themselves the Labours of Christ's Servants. If the end of their preaching be to make People fruitful, then they that continue barren and empty, make all vain to them, and lost on them, as the Dressers labour in digging is lost when no Fruit comes on it. Pray think of it: Many are ready to commend the Ministers and their Labour: O! this is a good Preacher, and that was an excellent, powerful, and profitable Sermon:

mon: But we should turn in, and inquire what Good it is that we get, and wherein we are better, and mended by such a Man, and such a Sermon. For, Sirs, good Mens best Labours are lost and empty to us, if we be not fruitful. If thou hast sate Twenty, Thirty, Forty Years under the digging and dunging of the ablest Men, but stood barren all that while, thou hast frustrated their Labours.

3. That unprofitable People will have a heavy Account to make one Day, when they must answer for all the digging and dunging of the Vine-dressers, and have all their Watchings, and Travels, and Sweatings rise up in Judgment against them.

O Sirs! there are two sorts of Persons, whose Judgment will be very heavy:

1. Unprofitable Persons under a painful and powerful Ministry, who shall be charged with all the Diggings and Dungings of the Vine-dressers. 2. Idle, negligent, and carnal Ministers among a barren and unprofitable People, that take no Pains in digging about, and dunging them, that they might be brought to Fruitfulness, who shall on the other side stand charged with the Barrenness, Emptiness, and Unprofitableness of that People, as those that have not done their Part, in digging about them, and dunging them, that they might bring forth the Fruits of Righteousness and Holiness.

Secondly,

Secondly, We pass unto the Second Argument, which we have, v. 9. [*And if it bear Fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down*] and it's taken *Ex arbore*.

It's as much as if he had said, Let it but alone this Year, while I dig about it, and dung it, and afterwards do according to the Fruit and Success of this further Time and Cost bestowed on it.

1. *If it bear Fruit, well.*] Here is *Abrupta oratio, imperfecta que sententia*: For the Word [well] put in here, in a different Character, is not in the Original, but put in by the Translators. The Defect may be filled up with,

1. *Well*] as our Translators; *q. d.* if when—then *Bene erit*.

2. *Sines*] as *Beza*. As tho' he should say, If it bear Fruit, then spare it, let it grow still.

3. Then it will be no more a Cumber to the Ground.

4. Then *Non opus erit eam succidere*. Or,

5. We may leave the Room unfilled up, as manifesting the Modesty of the Dresser, in not offering or taking upon him to prescribe the Lord of the Vineyard, what to do to this Tree, in case it proved fruitful at last; but leaving it to the Lord himself

to

to appoint (in that Case) what shall further be done about it.

2. *And if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down; q. d.* Then I will interpose no more, I will intercede no further for it, I will stand no more between it and the Ax, but wholly give it up.

1st. Observe, *That it is the great Concernment of a spared People to be a fruitful People. [If it bear Fruit, well.]* All lyes on this; the great TURN, as to the *Standing or Falling* of such Trees: So that, Sirs, if we look on it as a Matter of any Moment, as a Concernment of any Weight and Consequence, whether we Stand or Fall, Rise or Ruin for ever; I say, if this be any thing with us, then we must needs look on it as our Concernment to be fruitful in the Day of sparing Mercy, for our standing or falling stands on this. Oh think at it, so as that you may be fruitful!

2dly, Observe, *That when no Patience of God, no Pains of his Servants, can prevail with an unprofitable People, then DOWNCUTTING comes on them.* It was but One Year more that this Fig-tree was to stand, and be digged about, and dunged; and if this farther Patience, Care and Pains of the Dresser, were not attended with Fruit, then it must down without

The Barren Fig-Tree.

without more ado. So I say, when no Pains and Labour of the Ministers of Christ can prevail with an unprofitable People, then they must be cut down; that is their End. In this their Barrenness has its Issue. We might see this in many Instances and Examples, as in that of the old World, *Pharaoh, Israel, Judah and Jerusalem*, who when no Patience, no Labour, and no Pains, would make them fruitful, were left to the Ax, and went down.

1. Then the Lord will not ever let a barren People or Person alone: No, in the end he CUTS them off, *Psal. 37. 38.*

2. Then barren Persons may see what they are going towards, and what will come on them, if they continue as they are: There will be no Possibility of missing DOWN-CUTTING sooner or later.

3. Then let this warn you to beware of going on in Impenitency, while God is bearing with you, and his Servants are labouring over you. The Ax is before you, and if you continue barren, it will hew you down for ever.

3dly, Observe, *That no Patience of God, no Pains of his Servants, can keep some from DOWN-CUTTING.* Chuse how long the Lord bears with them, and how much his Servants labour over them; they

they continue inemendable, and will not be reformed or mended. Thus it was here; this Tree (shadowing this People) that was spared this fourth Year, was no better, but went down for its Barrenness in the end. All the Penitential Sermons of the Baptist, our Saviour's Premisor, the Preaching and Miracles of our Saviour himself, the Pains and Travels of his Apostles, who came after him, would not win them to any Repentance, or better Fruit. Alas! nothing will keep some from the Ax, let the Lord wait 10, 20, 30 or 40 Years, and let his Servants labour about them all this while, in digging and dunging them, and still they are the same at the end that they were at the beginning. All has done them no Good, leaves them no better. O think at it! It's a very sad, and it's a very common Case; many and many a one goes down in this fashion, after 30, 40, 50, or 60 Years Patience of God towards them, and Pains of his Servants with them; no Patience, no Pains can keep them from the Ax, but they will run upon it. When God had tarried, and Noah had preached 120 Years, the old World was drowned. So it is from time to time; and with Persons after long Patience and much Pains, are cut down at last. If any Patience or Pains might save them, God would not be wanting, nor his Ministers wanting, in exercising it
to,

to, and bestowing it on them; but alas nothing will do, nothing will keep them from the Ax.

If you should ask, whence is this? Or what may be the reason of this? Why, in a Word, it is from,

1. Sinners Infidelity and Unbelief. They live impenitent in their Sins and Barrenness how long soever God may bear with them, even till **DOWN-CUTTING** come upon them; because, 1. They will not believe that their Cases are such, as in Truth they are. 2. Nor believe that their Danger is what indeed it is. 3. Nor believe the Verity and Certainty of Divine Denunciation. It's said, that *Noah believed, and therefore prepared an Ark to the saving of his House*. The old World believed not any such thing, (notwithstanding *Noah's* 120 Years preaching to them about it) and therefore took no Course, either to prevent the coming, or to secure themselves when it came. Why, Sirs, this is the Case of impenitent Sinners, they will not believe what the Lord denounces against them from time to time by his faithful Messengers, and so take no Care to avoid their **DOWN-CUTTING**, which at last comes upon them with a home and fatal Stroke.

2. Sinners Hardness of Heart. Sin is of a hardning Nature, *Heb. 3. 13.* and by Continuance and Custom, many contract
such

such a Hardness in Evil, that nothing will move or melt them: Bend they will not, and break they must. This is another, *Jer. 5. 3. Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive Correction. Zach. 7. 11, 12. They refused to hearken, and pulled away the Shoulder, and stopped their Ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their Hearts as an Adamant-stone, lest they should hear the Law—*

3. Sinners Security, Stupidity, and Sensuality, whereby all Sense is lost, and all Regard to future things is laid aside. It's said, *Mat. 24. 38, 39.---They knew not, until the Flood came and took them all away.* But some may say, How knew they not? The Lord had given them warning, sent *Noah* to preach to them 120 Years before it came, set *Noah* on work in preparing the Ark, how then knew they not? Why, they regarded nothing but their own present sensual Courses, lay drowned under such a weight of Security, that nothing could enter their Thoughts of that that was coming upon them. So *Hosea 7. 9. It's said of Ephraim, That Strangers have devoured his Strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray Hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.* O! when Security has once laid Sinners asleep, nothing will awake them
till

till the Ax come ; nor that neither, before the very last Stroke that sets them a tumbling down to Destruction.

1. See what a sad Condition a Person or a People may fin themselves into. Is it not sad, when it comes to this with a Person or People, that nothing will do with them, no Patience nor Pains will keep them from DOWN-CUTTING? Surely, to be in such a Case, is very sad! And yet it is the Case of many at this very Day.

2. That Sinners perish, because they will perish. *God is Long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.* The Ministers of God dig and dung, and would not have Sinners cut down: But alas, poor Sinners themselves heed not, care not; nay, cut down they will be, rather than once frame themselves to bear any other Fruit than wild Figs.

4thly, Observe, *That Invincible and Incurable Barrenness in a Nation, Congregation, or Person, is a Forerunner of certain DOWN-CUTTING and Destruction to that Nation, Congregation or Person.* Now I call that Incurable Barrenness that continues in a Nation, or Congregation, or Person, after,

1. Much Forbearance and Long-suffering exercised towards them. As here, the

the Lord had come Three Years, and then a Fourth Year was obtain'd by the Dreffer, for further Trial of Fruitfulness. So,

2. Many Means and great Advantages bestowed on them in this time; as here in digging about them, and dunging them, and yet still barren and unfruitful. This I call incurable Barrenness, and this I say is an immediate Forerunner of DOWN-CUTTING. Both in regard of,

1. Temporal Devastation to a Nation.

2. Spiritual Deprivation to a Congregation of the Gospel.

3. Everlasting Destruction and Damnation of the Souls of Persons that thus remain incurably barren. See,

1. That many People wear very dreadful Marks upon them. If invisible Barrenness be the Mark and Forerunner of DOWN CUTTING, as most certain it is, then many are in very sad States. For Multitudes, Multitudes in these Days, have manifest and evident Symptoms on them of this sad Disease, *viz.* Invincible Barrenness; that they are incurably barren. Pray think at it. Many are visibly and lamentably barren, and empty of (if not open Enemies to) all Goodness; and they are thus, after,

1. Much Forbearance exercised towards them; many Days, and Years of God's Patience have gone over their Heads, and yet their Hearts and Lives are never

the better; but more barren, and further from any Good than in the beginning.

2. Many Means and great Advantages have been offered, and long continued to them. As they,

1. Have been digged about, dunged and watred. The clear and healing Waters of the Sanctuary have come to them, and run over them, yet these miry Places have not been healed, *Ezek. 47. 11.*

2. Have been pruned by the Hook of sharp and smarting Judgments and Afflictions. O! what dreadful Amputations have many had of Relations, Estates and Comforts, yet all has done them no Good; they are not better than they were before.

This, Sirs, is the Case of many, and you see, that this is an immediate Fore-runner of DOWN-CUTTING. So that these People wear dreadful Marks upon them of Destruction.

2. What *England*, the People of *England*, the Congregations in *England*, may justly fear, at this Day, *viz.* some heavy and dreadful Blow; such a Blow as will be DOWN-CUTTING, and lay this fair and flourishing, but fruitless Fig-tree, (that lifts up its Head on high) on the Ground, and in the Dust.

This, Sirs, we may fear, that our End is nigh to come, and our DOWN-CUTTING at the Door. For, Sirs, (among many

many other Presages hereof, that here I name not for Brevity-sake) this is our Case, *England's Case*. I may speak it with a trembling Heart, and you may hear it with Fear, the Ax is at the Root of the Tree. Are we not uncurably barren, empty of good Fruit? As it was said, (2 Kings 2. 19.) *The Citation of this City is pleasant — but the Water is naught, and the Ground is barren.* So it may be said of us of *England*, of the Cities and Towns thereof, the Situation is pleasant, but our Hearts are for the most part naught, and our Lives are barren of the good Fruits that should grow in them. Nay, are we not obstinately and incurably abandoned to an over-running measure of bad Fruits? Are not our Fruits wild, like the Grapes of the Lord's Vineyard of old, *Isa. 5. 2.* And naughty, like the Prophet's Figs, *Jer. 24. 2.* *Is not our Vine of the Vine of Sodom, our Grapes the Grapes of Gall? And our Clusters,* the Apostle speaks of, (*Gal. 5. 19, 20, 21.*) *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanness, Lasciviousness, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulation, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies, Envyings, Murders, Drunkenness and Revellings?* Why, none can question this; and therefore we have cause to fear that we are the Ground *that is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.* And that the Lord is resolving to do unto us, as he

Heb. 6. 8.

- Isa. 5. 56. did to his Vineyard of old.—*Take away the Hedge, and lay us waste, that we shall neither be pruned nor digged any more*—Saying of us, as they did of *Babylon*, *I would have healed you, but ye would not be healed*—Laying that Sentence on us, which was laid upon *Jerusalem*, *Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy Filthiness any more, till I have caused my Fury to rest upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it, it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent according to thy Ways, and according to thy Doings shall they judge thee.*
- Jer. 51. 9.
- Ezek. 24. 13, 14.

3. What Cause we all have to dread and fear such a State as this, a barren State, and Inemendableness in a barren State. O Sirs! beware of this, every one beware of this, as you would not help to hasten **DOWNCUTTING** on the Nation, **DOWNCUTTING** on the Places where you live; and as you would not draw certain, speedy, and eternal Destruction on your own Souls; invincible Barrenness is the Mark of endless Damnation; if no Fruit grow on us in the Church Militant, which is the Nursery, we shall never have room among the Trees of Righteousness in the Church Triumphant.

5thly, Observe, That Sinners may be reprieved for a Time, and yet afterwards perish.

perish. It was so here; this Tree was re-
prieved, but afterwards cut down. *Cham*
was preserved in the Ark from drowning,
but reserved for cursing. The People were
delivered out of the Hand of the *Egyptians*, Jude 5.
yet afterward were destroyed in the Wil-
derness. The Execution of Judgment is of-
ten suspended, when it is not reversed.
Many a poor Sinner has been just at the
Door of final OFF-CUTTING, and cast-
ing into the Fire on a sick Bed, and hath
escaped for that time; but notwithstanding
come to it again 10, 20, 30 or 40
Years after. *Pharoah* and the *Egyptians*,
after they had gone thro' Ten Plagues, Exod. 14.
were drowned in the Red Sea. *Balaam*, Num. 22.
who had escaped the Sword of the Angel, 22.
was afterward slain by the Sword of the Chap. 31.
Children of *Israel*. *Niniveh*, that esca-
ped the Destruction, denounced by *Jonah*, Nahum 3.
was afterwards utterly ruined. Remem- Luke 17.
ber *Lot's Wife*; she escaped the terrible 32.
Destruction, that came upon *Sodom*, yet
was shortly after made a Monument and
Spectacle.

1. Why, whence is this that Sinners
may be spared for a time, and yet after-
wards perish? Answer, because,

1. The Lord is long-suffering, and slow
to Anger. *The Lord is slow to Anger, and* Nah. 1. 3.
great in Power; he will not at all acquit
the Wicked. Mark, (1.) He is great in
Power; and (2.) He will not at all acquit

The Barren Fig-Tree.

the Wicked ; yet, (3.) He is slow to Anger. *Jer. 15. 6. Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward; therefore will I stretch out my Hand against thee, and destroy thee*—Here is Destruction denounced against the Jews, but was this as they had deserved by their Provocations? No, in no wise. The next Words plainly intimate that it was after long Patience, [I am weary with repenting.] As tho' he should have said, I have so often, and so long spared you, that Patience is worn out, and I'll wait no longer.

2. The Lord is very merciful. Not only patient, but also pitiful. A God full of Compassion, and delighting in Acts of Mercy. By this *Israel* was saved from perishing, when they were a sinking. *2 Kin. 13. 22, 23. It is said, That Hazael King of Syria oppressed Israel all the Days of Jehoahaz. But the Lord was gracious unto them, and had Compassion on them--- And would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his Presence as yet.* As yet he had Mercy for them, yet Mercy interposed between them and the fatal Stroke, that afterwards fell upon them.

3. The Lord will leave them without Excuse, by giving them time to repent and reform in. He gives Warning, Means and Time to Sinners for this end. The Apostle shews the Abusers of God's Forbearance and Long-suffering, wherefore it is that God

God doth so forbear them, and that is for this, *viz. That it may lead them to Repentance*, Rom. 2. 4. So 2 Pet. 3. 9. The Apostle tells those Scoffers, who hardened themselves in their Sin, *Because the Lord delayed his coming—That his Delaying was not Slackness, but Long-suffering*. He stayed, that they (and such as they) might repent, and not be taken in their Sins. So Jer. 8. 4, 5. we have the Sin and Impenitency of the People declared, *viz. That they had sidden back, by a perpetual Back-sliding; they held fast Deceit, they refused to return*. And what followed? Why, v. 6. *I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no Man repented him of his Wickedness, saying, What have I done?* They were become exceeding corrupt, yet the Lord had a time of hearkening and waiting, ere he would destroy them. Thus the Lord forbears, to see, as it were, whether Sinners will bethink themselves, and amend; even as a Father forbears his Child with much Patience before he turn him off.

4. Because their Sin is not full, nor their time come. Impenitent Sinners have a Measure to fill up. The Sin of the Jews, in rejecting and crucifying the Lord of Glory, were ripening Sins, filling Sins, Sins that ripened them apace for their DOWN-CUTTING, yet they were not fully ripe, and therefore were not instantly

Cut down. One thing was yet behind that must fill up their *Epha*, viz. Their utmost Endeavours to obstruct the Gospel, and particularly to hinder the Apostles from preaching to the *Gentiles*, and the *Gentiles* from receiving the Gospel, *1 Thes. 2. 16.* Forbidding us to speak to the *Gentiles*, that they might be saved, to fill up their Sins alway; for the Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost. As tho' he had said, this will fill all up.

Thus Sinners have a Measure; and as they have a Measure, so they have a Time, a Day. Impenitents have Two Days; 1. A Day of sinning. 2. A Day of falling. God will let them have their first Day, but then their second will come on them; they have, I say, their Day.

Saul had a Day, *1 Sam. 26. 10.* *Babylon* had a Day, *Jer. 50. 27.* *Jerusalem* had a Day, *Luke 19. 43.* This is another; Sinners may be spared for a time, because their Sin is not full, their Day of sinning is not past. But when once their Sin is full, and their Day of sinning over, then they go down, how long and oft soever they have escaped.

5. Because he reserves and keeps them for greater Evils. Sometimes they escape present Judgment, because they are reserved for future. *Theramines*, One of the Thirty Tyrants at *Athens*, who alone escaped out of the House, that falling slew the rest

rest of his Companions, when his Flatters told him of his great Happiness, in escaping that sudden Destruction; He, as convinced that he was not preserved, but reserved for some worse thing, cried out, *O fortuna cui me occasione servas.* So, I say, when ill Men escape, and come thro' some Ills, that their Companions, and others like them fall in, they may reckon and make account of some worse thing that is to come upon themselves.

6. Because (as here) the Vine-dressers interpose and interceed for them.

Use 1. Then let not those that have escaped, when they have been near to DOWN-CUTTING, think that therefore they shall ever escape, if they continue in their Sins. No, no, their present Impunity is no sign of future Immunity, but rather an Argument of greater Severity. I shewed you why it is that Sinners sometime escape present Judgments; therefore be not secure, nor flatter your selves when you have escaped.

2. How justly they perish, who go down after that the Ax has been lifted up over them again and again.

It's not for the first Fault; it's not the first time that they have been in Danger of DOWN-CUTTING.

Our

The Barren Fig-Tree.

Our Age is a barren Age; which way can we turn our Eyes, but we may see this?

1. If we look into the Nation, what almost can we see, but may make us think our Condition is like that of *Ephraim*? *Our Root is dried up, we shall bear no Fruit*, Hosea 9. 16.

2. If we look into Congregations, is their not a general Complaint of Unprofitableness? And is there not cause enough for it? We may say of many Congregations, as *Hosea* 10. 1. *Israel is an empty Vine, he bringeth forth Fruit unto himself*, q. d. He hath no Fruit in him for me, he is empty of what I should have—He bringeth forth Fruit unto himself; *i. e.* such as please himself, such as suite with his own Desires, his Lust, Gain, Pleasure. So,

3. If we look into our own Families, that should be as little Churches of Christ, How empty? How few Branches that have any Blossoms of Goodness? Alas, in this forlorn Age, Parents that have any Goodness, have much ado to keep their Children in any tolerable Compass; and those that are under a Necessity of keeping Servants, find it extream difficult to light on such as are but restrained from open Debauchery.

4. If we go further, and look into our own Hearts and Lives, what are many of them, but like Winter Trees, that have neither Fruit, nor Leaves, but stand naked?

The

The Trees of Wickedness are become like Nebuchadnezzar's Tree, Dan. 4. 10, 11. the height of it was great, reaching to Heaven; the Boughs and Branches of it reached over the Earth. But as to others, how naked are they, and how little Fruit is found on them?

6thly, Observe, *That the Case and Condition of a People is very sad, when Ministers give them up, and leave them into the Hands of God.* [Then after that thou shalt cut it down.] As tho' he should have said, Let it but stand this Year only, and if Matters be not mended, then, (1.) I will interpose no more for it. (2.) I will open my Mouth no more to sue for another Year's Standing, or a Day's Forbearance towards it. (3.) I will give it quite up, and leave it. I say, when it comes to this it is sad; when Ministers give a People up into the Hands of God, then there is nothing to stay the Stroke. For says the Apostle, *It is a fearful thing to fall into the Hands of the living God,* but most fearful to fall thus into the Hands of God, out of the Hand of the Vine-dressers, that have begged this Year for them, that have digged about them, and dunged them with Hopes and Expectation of Fruitfulness.

7thly, Observe, *That when the Lord is threatening a People with DOW N-CUT-
TING,*

The Barren Fig-Tree.

TING, *that have stood long barren and unfruitful in the Vineyard, and under the Labours of his Vine-dressers, there is no way to prevent that DOWN-CUTTING, but by becoming Fruitful.*

1. See what way we must now take, if we would escape this OFF-CUTTING, and keep God with us, His Gospel, His Ordinances, and His Messengers among us.

We have now gone over the Parable, and seen how sad and dreadful it is to be a barren Tree in God's Vineyard, after all his Patience, Long-suffering and Forbearance. I shall now close up all with this Observation from the whole.

1st, Observe, *That it is the great Duty and Concernment of Persons, who are placed and planted in the Lord's Vineyard, to bring forth becoming Fruit. Or it is the most and greatest Concernment to be as a fruitful Fig-tree in the Lord's Vineyard.*

In this only these Three Things are to be inquired of.

1. How, or wherein we must be like to, and resemble a good Fig-tree.

Now we should be like it in these Ten Respects. The Fig-tree, 1. Bears good, useful, and profitable Fruit, Fruit that is very serviceable.

Hence it is that the Lord mentions this as one of the Priviledges or Commodities of Canaan. The good Land that he promised,

fed, Deut. 8. 7, 8. A Land of Brooks of Water, of Fountains, and Depths, that spring out of Valleys and Hills, a Land of Wheat and Barley, and Vines, and Fig-trees, and Pomgranates, a Land of Oil-Olive and Honey. And it's commemorated as the great Blessing of Solomon's peaceful Reign, that Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every Man under his Vine, and under his Fig-tree, 1 Kings 4. 25. So we should bring forth good Fruits, as Holiness, Righteousness, and every good Work. These are the Fruits that we should yeild; for if we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us, then we shall have its Fruits also, which are Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness and Temperance. These are the Fruits God looks at; as the Apostle tells the Philippians in his concluding Sentence, Finally, Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good Report, if there be any Vertue, if there be any Praise, think on these things. So I say unto you, Think on these Things; i. e. to embrace them, to follow them, to practice them, to give your selves wholly to them. This Verse (as Trap) is a little Bible, comprizing that,

- | | | |
|----------|------------|-----------------|
| 1. Totum | } Hominis, | { Eccl. 12. 13. |
| 2. Bonum | | |

2. Bears

Rom. 6. 22.

Phil. 1. 11.

Col. 1. 10.

Gal. 5. 22, 23.

Phil. 4. 8.

The Barren Fig-Tree.

2. Bears early Fruit. It's a Tree that comes fast forward, and quickly begins to bear. It's observed of the Olive-tree, that no Man ever gathered the Fruit of that Tree that himself planted, so late are they of Growth; [Pl. 1.429.] but the Fig-tree grows apace, and quickly begins to bear. So in us, early, timely Fruit, without Delay, is most pleasing unto God; the Lord takes great Content in early Goodness and Fruitfulness; and there's no time for standing idle or empty in the Vineyard.

3. Bears constant and continual Fruit; it's scarce e're empty, but hath Blossoms, green Fruit, and ripe Fruit, succeeding one another almost all the Year. So, Sirs, we must not be weary in *well-doing*, Gal. 6. 9. But, (1.) *Continue*, 2 Tim. 3. 14. (2.) *Shew Diligence*, Heb. 6. 11. (3.) *Add to our Faith, Vertue; to Vertue, Knowledge; to Knowledge, Temperance; to Temperance, Patience; to Patience, Godliness; to Godliness, Brotherly Kindness; and to Brotherly Kindness, Charity.* All these follow one after another, as the Blossoms, green Fruit, and ripe Fruit, follow one another in the Fig-tree. Thus we must have respect unto all the Statutes and Commandments of the Lord continually, and do *Righteousness at all times; and by patient Continuance in well doing, seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality.*

4. Bears

4. Bears much Fruit; not only a little, but plentifully and abundantly. *Pliny* ranks them among Trees that carry great Burdens. One of them (he says) yeilded ordinarily 270 *Modii* of Figs in a Year. A *Modius* was a Roman Measure of dry things, somewhat less than our *half Strike*. So as we must not be weary, neither must we be slothful, or remiss in well doing, but abound, as well as abide in the Work. We must be stedfast, unmoveable, always *1 Cor. 15. 58.* abounding in the Work of the Lord, and be filled with the Fruits of Righteousness, *Phil. 1. 11.* The believing *Corinthians* abounded in every thing, the *Roman* were full of Goodness and Spiritual Knowledge, and *Dorcas* was full of good Works and *2 Cor. 8. 2.* Alms-deeds. Why thus, *Sirs*, it becomes us, to bear Fruit, that our Heavenly Father may be glorified, and that we may *Rom. 15. 14.* thereby manifest our selves to be his Disciples indeed. *Acts 9. 36. John 15. 8.*

5. Bears solid Fruit, Fruit that hath Substance and Matter in it. It's not fair to look upon, and hollow within, like *Sodom* Apples, but solid and substantial. So our Fruit must be kindly and teal, not made up of Shadows, without Substance, *Isa. 48. 1.* as Hypocrites, which make a fair Shew without, but not in Truth, nor in Righteousness; being near with our Mouth, and far off in our Hearts; like Trees, whose Fruit withereth, or without Fruit, twice dead, *Jer. 12. 2. Jude 12.*

dead, plucked up by the Roots: But (as Eph. 4. 24. the Apostle exhorts) *that we put on the new Man, which after God is created in Righteousness and true Holiness.* Of this sort we must be, if our Fruit be solid and substantial, such as resembles the Fig-tree.

6. Bears durable and abiding Fruit; Fruit that's not soon rotten, and will not keep, but that which is of Continuance, and may be kept in Store. Hence we read, *That Abigail hasted, and took Two Hundred Loaves, and Two Bottles of Wine, and Five Sheep ready dressed, and Five Measures of parched Corn, and an Hundred Clusters of Raisins, and Two Hundred Cakes of Figs, as a Present to David—And they found an Egyptian in the Field, and brought him to David, and gave him Bread and Water, and a piece of a Cake of Figs.* So that you see Figs are a durable and abiding Fruit, such as may be kept in store. So must our Fruit be, if we will resemble the Fig-tree; it must be abiding. It's said [of the Fruit] of Ephraim and Judah, *That their Goodness was like a Morning Cloud, and as the early Dew it goeth away.* But ours must not be of this Make, or like *Jonah's Gourd*, that sprung up in a Day, and withered in a Night, but lasting and remaining, *John 15. 16.*

7. The latter Figs are better than the hasty, and first Ripe, [Pliny, 1. p. 475.] The Fig-tree bears early Figs, that out-go
the

the rest in time. And these *Præcoces* are mighty graceful and welcome for the Rarity and Novelty; therefore the Prophet alludes to them, *Isa.* 28. 4. and *Hos.* 9. 10. *The Glorious Beauty, which is on the Head of the fat Valley, shall be a fading Flower, and as the hasty Fruit before the Summer: which when he that looketh upon it, seeth it, while it is yet in his Hand, he eateth it up.*—I found Israel like Grapes in the Wilderness; I saw your Fathers as the first ripe in the Fig-tree, at the first time. But tho' these be very grateful and pleasant, yet they are not so solid and serviceable as the after. The latter are the better.

So Sirs, we should still bring forth better and better Fruit, and grow in Goodness. *De Vita ad Vitam, de Actu ad Actum, de Bonis ad Meliora, de Utilibus* 4. 18. *ad Utiliora, de Sanctis ad Sanctiora*: From Life to Life, from Action to Action, from Good things to Better, from Profitable things to more Profitable, from Holy to more Holy.

It was the great Commendation of the Church of *Thyatira*, *That her last Works* *Rev.* 2. 19. *were more than the first.* O! this would be a Commendation indeed, if our latter Fruit is better than our early Fruit, and our last Works more and better than our first! Pray think upon it: We live in decaying times, wherein many are of the *Ephesian*

Temper, *Left their first Love*, Apoc. 2. 4, 5.

Pliny, *lb.*
474.

8. The Leaf of the Fig-tree follows, and cometh forth after the Fruit: So our Profession should follow our Fruit. This should be as early and forward as that in us; and not first a great sight of fair Leaves afore, and without any Fruit, any real Goodness, as in many, who put out many Leaves, but little Fruit.

Pliny 479.

9. The Fig-tree hath her Fruit above the Leaf, other Trees under the Leaf commonly. We must not do our Works to be seen of Men, but our Fruit must come forth into Sight, and be open, visible, and manifest in us in our daily Conversation. *Mat. 5. 16. says our Saviour, Let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorifie your Father which is in Heaven.* And so the Apostle, *1 Pet. 2. 11, 12. so I say, Let your Fruit be as visible as your Leaves, and appear on the top of your Leaves of Profession to the Sight, and be manifest in our Conversation.*

10. The Fig-tree carries her Fruit, both at the Sides, and at the Ends of her Branches; no part is empty. *Pliny 474.*

In this again, we must observe, That we must be extensively and universally fruitful; fruitful all over. Our Aim and Endeavour must be to be perfect and entire, wanting nothing; *i. e.* In no Point

or Duty of Holiness and Righteousness, as the Apostle says to the *Corinthians*, when ^{2 Cor. 8.7.} *As ye abound in every thing, in Faith and Utterance, and Knowledge, and in all Diligence, and in your Love to us, see that ye abound in this Grace also; i. e.* see that ye be wanting in nothing. So Sirs, we should fill all up, that nothing be amiss, no part be wanting. Many pray much, and hear much, and know much, but yet are wanting in something; there is something, whereof we may say, they do not abound in this also. They abound in good Expressions, and Profession, but they do not abound in Gracious Actions and Practices: They abound in Prayers and Performances, but they do not abound also in Mercy, Humility, Holiness, Righteousness, and all Godly Sincerity. But, O Christian! labour to abound in this also; that is, in whatsoever you are wanting. Be fruitful universally, abound in every good Word and Work.

Be fruitful in your,

1. *Hearts.* In the Liveliness and Exercise of Grace. *The Fruits of the Spirit is* Gal. 5. 22: *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, and Temperance.* O let your Hearts be as a Garden, where these precious Fruits grow and flow.

2. *Minds and Understanding.* Not
 2Tim. 3.7. like to those that are *ever learning, and never able to come to the Knowledge of the Truth.* But as the Romans, of whom the Apostle was perswaded, that they were full of Goodness, and filled with all Knowledge. O, let your Minds be thus filled with Knowledge, and with a warm, working, transforming Knowledge. Such a Knowledge, as the Apostle begged for the Philippians, That their Love might abound yet more and more in Knowledge, and in all Judgment, that they might approve things that are excellent, that they might be sincere, and without Offence. I say, study to be fruitful in this Knowledge, that leads to approve Things that are excellent. To walk worthy of this high Calling whereunto ye are called, and to be fruitful in every good Word or Work.

4. *Memories.* The Memory is the Treasurer that lays up, and the Treasury that keeps what is laid up. Now to be fruitful in the Memory, by *treasuring up Truths, Promises, Experiences* in them, is acceptable unto God, and profitable to our selves. It's said of Mary, That she kept all these Sayings in her Heart. So lay these things to Heart, and treasure them up in your Memories. Hereby you may come, as the Spouse, to have All manner

of pleasant Fruits, new and old, laid up for your Beloved. Let not these be empty. Cant. 7.13.

4. *Affections.* The Affections are (as one observes) both the Hands and Handles of the Heart. The *Hands* that take hold for the *Heart*, the *Handles* that the *Heart* is taken by. Your Hearts can receive nothing that is good, unless the Affections first take hold thereof: And nothing can take hold of your Hearts, but by your Affection. These are the Chariot of the Soul, and they carry all with them; engage the Tongue, and Hands, and Feet, and Thoughts, and all to go the same way that they go. Oh labour therefore to have them set on Good, full for God, Christ, Grace, Holiness and Heaven, and then they will carry all Mind and Thoughts, Tongue and Heart, Hands and Feet that way; namely, to God, and Christ, and Heaven. O! were our Affections, as full for God and Heaven, as for worldly Business, we should not, as now we do, have our Hearts set so much upon, and our selves be so much for the World.

5. *Communications and Converses.* Let your Mouth be as a Well of Life, and your Tongue as a Tree of Life. Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying. O learn thus to use your Tongue, for Edification, to the Glory of God, and to the Good of others! This is the wise

Prov. 10.
11, and
15. 4.

Eph. 4. 29.

Man's Remark, that the Tongue of the wise useth Knowledge aright, *Prov. 15.2.*

6. *Conversations and Actions.* In your *Humble, Holy, Blameless* and *Winning Carriage* towards all. The Apostle tells us of a *Winning Conversation*—*1 Pet. 3. 1. If Husbands obey not the Word, they also may without the Word be won by the Conversation of the Wives.* Certainly this should be every Body's Conversation. Now that is a winning Conversation, when our Hearts, Words and Works agree, and answer one another. When we make the Word of God, *A Lamp unto our Feet, and a Light unto our Paths, Walking and Practicing* according to it. Learn this to order your Conversation in all the Parts of it, according to this Rule. Learn to talk and act by this Rule, eat and drink by this Rule, buy and sell by this Rule, do all by this Rule; so shall you not be barren nor unfruitful in your Conversation.

Psal. 119.
105.

7. *Callings, Trades and Negotiations,* of what kind soever. Be *fruitful, Sirs,* in these, by bringing forth Fruits of Truth, Equity, Honesty, and Mercy in all your Dealings. O see to this! If you have not this Fruit, all your Religion is in vain. Nay, alas! if this Fruit be away, and we empty of it, and Frauds, Falshood and Injustice should fill the Room, that Truth, Equity, Integrity and Mercy should have, you shame Christ and Religion. And indeed

deed this Fruit, Fruit proper to our Callings, is very rare, like the first ripe Figs in these Days. *Most Men will proclaim every one his own Goodness; but a faithful Man who can find?* Among these Boasters a faithful Man, a Man that will deal honestly, squarely, uprightly, and mercifully; a Man that may be taken at his Word, and trusted, is *Rara avis*; therefore we may pray with the Psalmist—*Help, Lord, for the godly Man ceaseth; the faithful fail from among the Children of Men.* Prov. 20. 6. Psal. 12. 1.

8. *Relations.* As you are *Husbands and Wives, Parents and Children, Masters and Servants.* It is the Character of the godly Man, *That he shall be like a Tree planted by the Rivers of Water, that bringeth forth his Fruit in his Season.* Psal. 1. 3.

[*His Fruit in his Season.*] i. e. That Fruit that is proper and suitable for him in the Station and Relation that he is set in. As if one be a,

1. Husband, Love is a Fruit suitable to that Relation.

2. Wife, Obedience, Submission and Modesty, are Fruits suitable thereunto.

3. Parent, Counsel, Correction and Instruction, are suitable Fruits for that Relation.

4. Child, Reverence, Dutifulness, is suitable Fruits for such to bring forth.

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5. Masters, Meekness is a suitable Fruit.

6. Servants, Obedience and Faithfulness are suitable Fruits for that Relation. O Sirs! shew forth these and other suitable Fruits in your Relation: Else whatever your Profession may be, you are not fruitful.

Truly, Sirs, a,

(1.) Good Man, but a churlish and cross Husband. (2.) A good Woman, but a froward and disobedient Wife. (3.) A good Christian, but a bad Parent; that neither instructs nor corrects. (4.) A good Child, but stubborn and undutiful. (5.) A godly Man, but a hard Master. (6.) A good Servant, but a naughty Tongue, or an unfaithful Hand. (7.) A good Person, but an ill Neighbour, are things that sound very harsh, and are mighty incongruous, and such Contradictions, as I will leave others to reconcile, for I know not how to make them agree.

I might add more Particulars of this kind, but these Seven are sufficient, to shew how extensive and universal our Fruitfulness ought to be.

Now we have explain'd the first thing proposed, and may from these Ten Particulars see how, and wherein we should be as a good Fig-tree in the Lord's Vineyard; *Viz.* (1.) In bearing good, useful, and profitable Fruit. (2.) In bearing early Fruit. (3.) In bearing constant and continual

tinual Fruit. (4.) In bearing much Fruit. (5.) In bearing solid Fruit. (6.) In bearing durable and abiding Fruit. (7.) That our latter Fruit be better than our former. (8.) That our Profession should follow our Fruit, as the Leaves of the Fig-tree follow and come forth after the Fruit. (9.) That our Fruit come forth into sight, and be visible and manifest in our daily Conversation, like the Fig-tree, whose Fruit is above the Leaves. (10.) That we must be extensively and universally fruitful, as the Fig-tree carries her Fruit, both at the sides, and at the ends of her Branches. This, I say, is to be like fruitful Fig-trees in the Lord's Vineyard.

2dly, Some Inducements that may persuade and press us unto this; viz. to be fruitful. Now of many that might be made use of in this necessary Affair, I shall only mention these Nine or Ten, that you may think on this, and set about it. I may tell you, that,

1. That it is a Matter that does nearly concern every one of us. We, you, and I, are concern'd to mind it as guilty, and deeply guilty of Unfruitfulness. What think you, are we not? Can any one of us look back, and go over the Ten fore-mention'd Particulars, and when we have done, say, that we have not been wanting, sadly wanting in Fruit? I confess I cannot,

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not, and I cannot believe that any of you can. Alas! have we not empty Hearts, empty Minds, empty Desires, and empty Professions? Is not all the Fruit that is to be found with us like the gleaning Grapes, when the Vintage is over? Rather than like the Tree that is waiting for the Vintage, to unlade its heavy Clusters, and ease its burden'd Branches?

2. That the Lord has had long Patience towards us; and we have stood in the Vineyard many Years, many Years after, we have seen many going down. This may be another. One has gone down in one corner, another in another corner. Nay, as the Psalmist says of the Godly, whose Confidence is in the EVERLAST-
Psal. 91. 7. *ING STRENGTH—A Thousand shall fall at thy Side, and Ten Thousand at thy Right Hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.* So I may say, a Thousand have fallen at our side, and yet it [the Ax] has not come nigh us. O sparing Mercy! But how long, how long? Can we think that to-morrow will be as this Day, and the next Year, as this Year. Nay, the longer we are spared, the nearer we may fear our time is.

3. That the Lord is still coming to seek for Fruit on us from time to time. And for becoming Fruit, suitable Fruit, Fruit answerable to our Professions, that we have put on, to our Time, Means, and Helps
that

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that we have had; viz. much Fruit. This God looks for of us: Not here and there a poor dry Fig, but Branches full at Sides and Ends; and therefore this may be another Motive to induce us to Diligence in this great and momentous Business. Have we not need to bestir our selves, seeing the Lord is coming to seek Fruit on us.

4. The Lord had rather see Fruit, than send Fire upon thee. Sirs, if we have a Tree in our Garden, that we have planted for Fruit, and bestowed Cost on, would we not rather find Fruit than not? Why so, Sirs? The Lord he comes seeking Fruit, that is his Desire; this he'd find, and *He has no Pleasure in the Death of him that dieth*——It's not the barren, but the fruitful Tree that we take Pleasure in. Ezek. 18. 31, 32.

5. That however the Lord had rather find us fruitful, yet if we be not fruitful, we shall not escape Down-cutting. He would have Fruit; but if this will not be, he'll have us to the Fire. Let's not deceive our selves with vain Words, it will come to this. For,

1. *The Ax is laid to the Root of the Trees; therefore every Tree which bringeth not forth good Fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the Fire, without any Distinction or Exception.* Matth. 3. 10.

2. Thou

2. Thou nor I cannot resist the Stroke when the Ax comes upon us. We see that the strongest and stoutest ONES, that have stood and kept up their Heads against all Winds and Weathers, yet bow and fall before the Ax, when the last and fatal Stroke comes. On like manner, *Eccl. 8. 8. There is no Man that hath Power over the Spirit, to retain the Spirit; neither hath he Power in the Day of Death; and there is no Discharge in this War.*

2 Sam. 2.
18.

3. Thou canst not outrun the Stroke. As there's no resisting, so there is no running when it comes. Many, as *Asabel*, have run fast to overtake Death, but none, tho' as light of Foot as a wild Roe could ever outrun Death. When the Feller is coming with the Ax on his Shoulder, the Tree cannot stir, or shift one Foot off from its place.

Psal. 90.
5, 6.

4. A little Blow will be enough to bring thee down. A sturdy Oak that has stood many a Year, goes down in a little time, and with a few Blows of the Ax. There will need no long time, or great Pains to bring any of us down. *Thou carriest them away as with a Flood (says the Psalmist) they are as a Sheep—They are like Grass, in the Morning it flourishes, in the Evening it is cut down, and withereth.*

Psal. 90. 3.

A Word is enough — Thou turnest Man to Destruction. Nay, a Look from Omnipotence will send us out of the Vineyard.

yard.—*Thine Eyes are upon me, (says Job) and I am not.*

6thly, That this Year may be our last Year. The *Ultimus Divinae, Patientiae*. O! who can tell how near him the **FEL-LING FATAL AX** may be? It was *Solo-mon's* Admonition—*Boast not thy self of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a Day may bring forth.* And says the Apostle, *Ye know not what shall be on the morrow.* Prov. 27.1. Jam. 4. 14. O think at this too! Thou knowest not but that Matters are this very Day come to this with thee; *viz.* That it must be now or never; therefore there's no time for trifling.

7. That the **DOWN-CUTTING STROKE** will be a sad Stroke to all barren and empty Trees; it will be tremendous: For, (1.) It will light on the Soul, the precious Soul. (2.) It will cut off this Soul from God and Christ. (3.) It will cut off all Hopes from this Soul of ever seeing any Good for ever. (4.) It will set it on tumbling down into an everlasting Fire. O it cannot be expressed how sad and dreadful it will be! It's a Stroke that will make our Condition hopeless, helpless, and irrecoverable. *Job 14. 7, 8, 9, 10. There is hope of a Tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender Branches thereof will not cease, &c.—But Man dieth—and where is he?*

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8. Fruitfulness will prevent this fatal Blow. If you bear Fruit, you shall not be cut down, (*Romanæ Leges pœnam pregnantî deferunt,*) but be spar'd for the Fruit's sake. Yea, it was the Lord's own Law, that such Trees as brought useful Fruit, should not be destroy'd when they came into an Enemies Country, *Deut. 20. 19, 20.* Would he have the Fruit-bearing Trees spared, and will he not spare the fruitful Soul? Yea, if there be Fruit, if but a Blessing in the Seed or Cluster, he will say, as *Isa. 65. 8.* *My Thoughts are not your Thoughts, neither are your Ways my Ways, saith the Lord.* And *John 15. 2.* *Every Branch that beareth Fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more Fruit.* This is another, it will keep DOWN-CUTTING off from you; yea, and help to keep it off from the Church and Nation that is fruitful.

9. Fruitfulness will be a great Ornament to your selves: We know that it's Fruit that adorns a Tree; and the more it bears on its Branches; the more fair it is to look upon. On like manner, it is Fruit that adorns a Person, and makes him an Ornament to Religion. O be such a one in thy Generation, as that the Lord may call thy Name, *A green Olive-tree, fair, and of goodly Fruit!* *Jer. 11. 16.*

10. Fruit.

10. Fruitfulness will bring Honour to God, and a Crown in the end to thy self. In thy Fruitfulness God will be honoured, and you will be saved. (1.) God will be honoured, and your selves filled with the Fruits of Righteousness, *Phil. 1. 11.* (2.) Your own Souls will have Glory, Honour, and Immortality, *Rom. 2. 7.*

Thirdly, Directions for our Help in this great Duty. Would you be like to, and resemble a good Fig-tree, then take this Word of Direction with you.

1. See that you be really ingrafted into Christ. *The Branch cannot bear Fruit of it self, except it abide in the Vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me,* says Christ, *John 15. 4.* And *v. 5.* Without me ye can do nothing, i. e. severed and separated from ye can do nothing. Christ is resembled to a ROOT, (*Apoc. 22. 16.*) And those that would bear Fruit, must be rooted and built up in him. All the Ver- *Col. 2. 7.* tue, Juice and Sap comes from the Root that nourishes the Fruit on the Branches; so all Grace and Spiritual Nourishment comes from Christ the ROOT, that makes us fruitful; and as the Branch depends on the Root, so do we on him.

2. Labour to get the Impediments of Fruit removed. Trees have several Diseases, and divers ill Accidents, that do much hurt, and hinder them in bearing of Fruit.
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And the like are incident to Spiritual Trees I only mention One or Two. Trees never do well when they are, 1. Hide-bound. This hinders the Sap from ascending up from the Root, to nourish the Fruit; and Trees that labour under this Disease, yeild but little and poor Fruit. The Remedy is, loosing the Earth about the Root, and hacking the Bark; so Christians are subject to such a Fruit-hindering Disease as this, by suffering the World to clog about their Hearts, that stop the Passages, dry up their Spiritual Sap towards the things of Heaven, and make them as Hide-bound, dry and sapless Trees. O look to this! It's a common Disease, and makes many a poor Christian that labours under it yeild but little and poor Fruit: And therefore, Sirs, if ever you would be fruitful, get the Earth loosed from about your Hearts. This marrs all.

2. The Sap issues into, and is spent in nourishing of Leaves, and superfluous Branches. The Remedy is pruning and cutting off these Suckers from them; so here, Sirs, when Persons begin to put forth, and make a Shew of Religion, and then turn unto, and rest in some External Exercises; as Praying, and Hearing, and Reading; spending all that they lay out in Religion, in these only; why, this makes them barren in great Fruits of Godliness. O beware of this, of resting in some outward

ward Performances, and thinking that these will serve, without those real and solid Fruits beforementioned.

3. Wildred with Briars, Brambles and Thorns; for these strongly draw the Juice and Fatness of the Earth to them, and so deceive the better Plants of their Nourishment. Why, on the like manner Corruptions indulged in the Hearts of Persons, do much marr them for bearing Fruit. The Fruits of the Spirit, and the Fruits of the Flesh, do never prosper together. If thou wouldest be fruitful, then down with Thorns and Briars; *mortifie all Filthiness, and superfluity of Naughtiness, together with all Malice, and all Guile, and Hypocrisies, and Envy, and evil Speakings; and as new-born Babes, desire the sincere Milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby,* James 1. 21. 1 Pet. 2. 1, 2.

3dly, Keep under the Ordinances of Christ, near unto the Waters of the Sanctuary. Trees flourish most that are planted by Rivers. Ezek. 31. 3, to 6. *The Assyrian was a Cedar in Lebanon with fair Branches, and with a shadowing Shroud, and of an high Stature. — The Waters made him great, the Deep set him up on high, with her Rivers running round about his Plants, and sent out her little Rivers unto all the Trees of the Field.*

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Therefore his height was exalted above all the Trees of the Field, and his Boughs were multiplied, and his Branches became long; because of the multitude of Waters— So Persons are most fruitful, that are most careful to keep to, and improve Ordinances. *The Righteous shall flourish like the Palm-tree, he shall grow like a Cedar in Lebanon, Psal. 92. 12, 13.* Hence the Godly Man is resembled — To a Tree planted by the River of Water, that bringeth forth his Fruit in his season, whose Leaf shall not wither, Psal. 1. 3. Ezek. 47. 12. Ordinances are as a River, in them the Spirit conveys Living Waters; the Juice and Fatness of Heaven to them that are planted by 'em.

4thly, *Keep Humble.* This is another Particular. High Mountains are barren, Valleys and lower Grounds are for fruitfulness. Says Christ, *I went down into the Garden of Nuts, to see the Fruits of the Valley.* And he is the *Rose of Sharon, and the Lilly of the Valleys.*

The Lord *Virulam* observes, That in France, the Grapes that make the Wine, grow upon the low Vines, bound to small Stakes; and the raised Vines make but Verjuice. And he observes of the Fig-tree, that when it beginneth to put forth Leaves, if its top be cut off it maketh the Figs

Figs much better. Certainly, Sirs, the humblest Persons are the most fruitful Persons. Pride spoils many a Professor; and as a Caterpillar, eats up his Fruit while it's but in the Blossom, before it comes to Maturity.

5thly, *Keep your selves in the Company of Lively and Fruitful Persons*; this will be a great help unto Fruitfulness. Some observe a Sympathy of Plants, viz. That some Trees will bear better, when others are near them, than when they grow alone; as the Myrtle and Olive. This is sure, (as one observes) the Trees of Righteousness, when they associate, and grow near together, thrive best in Godliness. Thus Christ speaks of the Church, — *Thy Teeth are like a Flock of Sheep that are even shorn, which come up from the washing; whereof every one bare Twins, and none is barren among them.* O! where Professors are, and go together in Flocks and Companies, there is Fruitfulness, and every one bears Twins; one warms, and waters, and helps another: Therefore have a Care how and with whom thou associates thy self in Company and Friendship.

Cant. 4. 2.

6thly, Pray that thou may'st be made fruitful; beg it. The Apostle tells us, 1 Cor. 3. 6. *I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase.* This is

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his Work, to give the increase: And therefore when he would have the *Philippians* fruitful, he goes to God for them, *Chap. 1. 9, 10.* And so for the *Colossians*, *Chap. 1. 9, 10.* — *We do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his Will in all Wisdom and Spiritual Understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good Work.* And thus if thou would'st be made fruitful, thou must go to him for thy self, and wait for help. O Pray, Pray, that he would cause the Dew to fall upon you, and make you like the Tree bearing Twelve manner of Fruits, and yielding her Fruit every Month; that you may be fruitful in your Minds, Memories, Affections, Communications, Conversations, Callings, and Relations; that you may be Enriched with all sorts of Spiritual Fruits, and that at all times. We have now done with this Parable, and shall leave what has been laid before you with these Two Words only.

1. To them that shall continue barren. Sirs, if any of you, after all this, shall continue barren, let me tell you once again, and leave it with you, that this Fatal **DOWN-CUTTING** will come upon you. You do but hear of it now,
you

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you shall most certainly see it, and feel it, not many Days hence.

2. To them that are bearing precious Fruit: Do you abide and abound more and more in the Fruit of your Righteousness; your Labour shall not be in vain; your Work shall be recompenced, and a full Reward shall be given you of the Lord, who made Heaven and Earth.

In the Parable of the Sower, *Mat. 13.* our Saviour makes this the Cause of the unfruitfulness of the Seed sown in the Thorny Ground, *v. 7.* What Thorny Ground? Why, (*v. 22.*) *He that received Seed among the Thorns, is he that heareth the Word, and the Care of this World, and the Deceitfulness of Riches choak the Word, and he becometh unfruitful:* These are the Thorns that choak the Word, and make it unfruitful. It is Recorded by *Mark*, — *The Cares of* *Mat. 4. 19.* *this World, the Deceitfulness of Riches, and the Lusts of other things entering in, choak the Word, and it becometh unfruitful.* And *Luke* tells us, that *the Seed* *Luke 8. 14.* *which fell among Thorns, are they, which when they have heard, go forth, and are choaked with Cares, and Riches, and Pleasures of this Life, and bring no Fruit to perfection.* As Thorns choak the Seed, (1.) By leaving no room for it to grow,
M 3 thrive,

thrive, and ripen in, and by their withdrawing due Nourishment from it; even so here the Cares of this Life, the Deceitfulness of Riches, and other Lusts and Pleasures, choak the precious Seed of the Word of Life. (1.) By taking up the room it should have in their Thoughts, Hearts and Affections. And, (2.) By drawing away their Hearts and Affections from it. Now that the Word may grow to Fruit, the Heart must be set to the Word, as *Moses* directs the *Israelites*, *Deut.* 32.46. to set their Hearts to all the Words which he had testified among them. But these Cares, the Deceitfulness of Riches, &c. carry away the Strength of the Heart and Affections from the Word unto the World, as noxious Weeds draw away the Strength of the Earth from good Seed.

Thus, Sirs, Cares, Riches, and Worldly Pleasures; *i. e.* (1.) Earthly-mindedness. (2.) Crouds of Earthly Business. (3.) Incessant Cogitations and Communications about the things of this World, which divide and multiply themselves into an infinite variety. And, (4.) Lawful and Honest Cares and Thoughts of our Callings, Affairs, Trade and Business, that come in unseasonably: I say, these choak the Fruit of Conversion, Repentance, Reformation, Sanctification and Salvation in Thousands, and cause poor and sorry Fruit in others.

The

The Holy Apostle *James* exhorts, To *Jam. 1. 21.*
lay apart all Filthiness, and Superfluity of
Naughtiness, and receive with Meekness
the Engrafted Word, which is able to save
Souls. So likewise the Apostle *Peter* ex- *1 Pet. 2. 1,*
horts to lay aside all Malice, Guile, Hypo-
crisies, Envies, &c. — *And as new born*
Babes, desire the sincere Milk of the Word,
that ye may grow thereby. In both these
 places the Holy Apostles lay down the
 Duty incumbent on them that would pro-
 fit by the Word; and this is to make way
 for it to come to their Hearts, and room
 for it in their Hearts, by removing of Im-
 pediments and Obstructions out of the way.
 These are their own Corruptions and Lusts
 here particularly enumerated, all Filthi-
 ness, and Superfluity of Naughtiness;
 these are Spiritual Briars and Brambles
 that choak the precious Seed of the Word.
 Therefore remove and do away these Im-
 pediments, and abide and abound more
 and more in the Fruit of Righteousness,
 and your Labour shall not be in vain in the
 Lord.

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

PAge 10. line 10. for *was* r. *were*. l. 27. f. *Barren*
 r. *Bare*. p. 15. l. 31. r. *God's*. p. 22. l. 10. r. *there's*
not one, but many of these; and the Vineyard is tantum
non, turned into— p. 23. l. last, f. *Groan* r. *Grow*. p. 28.
 l. 31. f. *we* r. *He*, and l. 32. r. *in Juventute*. p. 31. l.
 16. f. *on* r. *an*. p. 37. l. 20. f. *Humbled* r. *Stumbled*. p.
 39. l. 25. r. *Angelos*. p. 42. l. 12. f. *he* r. *we*. p. 43. l.
 31. f. *since* r. *hence*. p. 51. l. 24. r. *were*. p. 54. l. 21.
 r. *Penitendum*. p. 55. l. 5. dele *the*. p. 57. l. 9. r. *Im-*
punity. l. 27. r. *this*. p. 58. l. 9. f. *that* r. *and*. l. 11. r.
Isa. l. 12. r. *præmia*. l. 13. f. *per sære* r. *pensare*. p. 62.
 l. 2. f. *sake* r. *fate*. p. 63. l. 24. dele *they*. p. 64. l. 7. f.
Growth r. *Grow*. p. 79. l. 27. r. *wearying*. p. 88. l. 19.
 r. *Confirmeth*. p. 103. l. 17. f. *on* r. *one*. p. 120. l. 26,
 27. f. *on* r. *or*. p. 124. l. 4. add *depend*. p. 125. l. 27.
 add *Him*. p. 128. l. 24. f. *Christ* r. *the Text*. Mat. 3.
 10. p. 135. l. 3. f. *his* r. *this*. p. 141. l. 7. f. *premisor*
 r. *precursor*. p. 145. l. 18. f. *Invisible* r. *Invincible*. p.
 147. l. 8. f. *Citation* r. *Situation*. p. 147. l. 23. add
such as. p. 161. l. 2. r. *Grateful*. p. 172. l. 28. f.
Sheep r. *sleep*. p. 175. l. 19. add *me*.

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